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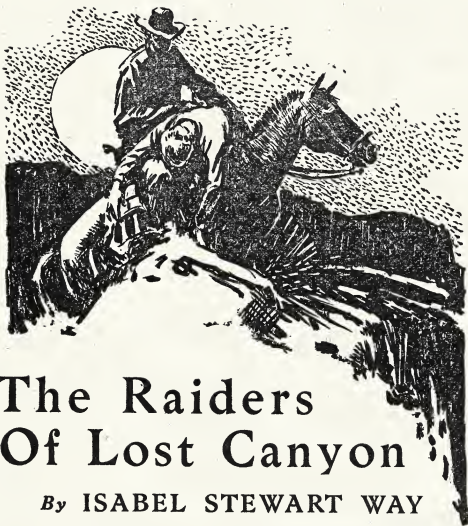
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The Raiders Of Lost Canyon

By ISABEL STEWART WAY

CHAPTER I.

THE DEVIL'S SPAWN.

IN fifty years, the Burnt Wagons Trading Post, at Starvation Springs, had grown from a single pack horse—a gray old nag with a bullet scar across one rump—to a frame store of mammoth proportions.

Here the Indians had brought their furs, from the higher reaches of the reservation, their turquoise and tourmalines dug from the moun-

tainsides, and traded them for food, tobacco, knives, or lengths of bright calico for the eager, chattering squaws.

Here the desert rats now came to exchange their gold dust for food and raiment, or to ask generous Luke Rutherford for grubstakes. Here the ranchers traded beeves for fencing, for feed, for tools, or even for a piano, to be freighted across the desert to ease the loneliness of some female. Luke Rutherford traded in everything.

A real general of commerce was he, and, like a general, he held a fortress, for the trading post resembled nothing else. It stood in the center of a stockade, with a roomy, two-story log cabin beside it. The second-story windows of both the cabin and the trading post were small, set at advantageous points for commanding all means of approach. The walls of saplings, lashed to-

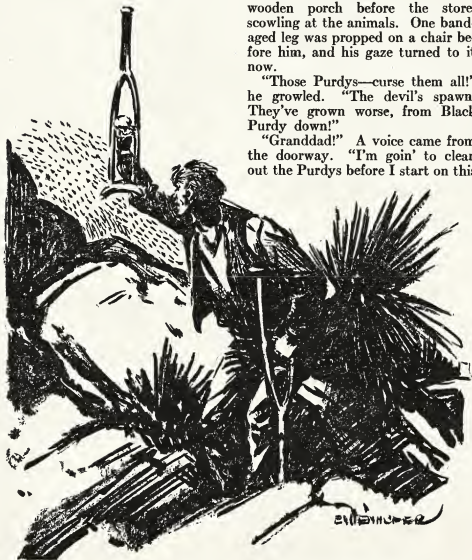
gether and sharpened at the top, had heavy gates, which could be closed securely to barricade the place.

The gates were open this morning, although it was scarcely dawn. At the hitch rack, before the post, a pack burro waited with bulging panniers. A saddled horse was there, too; a small black mare, whose sturdily built body showed endurance as well as strength.

Luke Rutherford sat on the wooden porch before the store, scowling at the animals. One bandaged leg was propped on a chair before him, and his gaze turned to it now.

"Those Purdys—curse them all!" he growled. "The devil's spawn! They've grown worse, from Black Purdy down!"

"Granddad!" A voice came from the doorway. "I'm goin' to clean out the Purdys before I start on this



trip. We know well enough it was one of them that did you in last night!"

Luke's keen gray eyes turned toward his grandson. "None but a Purdy would shoot at a man from the dark, as we've good cause to remember."

Dave Rutherford's lean young face grew grave; his gray eyes, dark like those of his grandsire, narrowed as he looked toward the upper reaches of Starvation Valley, where the last of the Purdys—Rutherford enemies for three generations—were entrenched.

"I haven't forgotten, granddad," Dave agreed soberly, "that Black Purdy clubbed your mother to death, massacred your friends, and that he and his offspring have preyed upon you and yours ever since. Now I'm goin' to stamp out that rattler's den before I go to the desert. I've waited too long as it is!"

Luke smiled wryly. "If stampin' out the Purdys was as easy as that—just a mornin's work, done by a lad willin' himself to do it—do you think I'd have let them live all these years? That desert trip—I'm wantin' you to make it first, Davey!"

Rebelliously, Dave went over to his horse, slipped a well-kept rifle into the scabbard.

"All right," he said shortly. "But when I come back there'll be an end to it."

SOMEHOW there never seems to be an end to that fight." Luke sighed, his big head, with its thatch of iron-gray hair, sinking on his chest. "I may not live to see the finish," he added grimly, "but I've got the satisfaction of knowin' it was my bullet that finished Black Purdy himself!"

Dave leaned his arms on the sad-

dle and stared toward the Purdy ranch. His heavy dark brows were drawn together in a puzzled frown. "What gets me," he began, "is why the devils stopped at cripplin' you last night! You were a perfect target as you stood there outside the gate, smokin'. They're good shots, both Fi and Zeph. They could have easy killed you!"

He stopped, straightened up, still staring intently toward the hills. "I keep wonderin' about that," he muttered.

Luke leaned forward. "They've got somethin' up their sleeves, all right! The Purdys come smarter every generation. Fi Purdy's got more brains than old Black ever had, and Fi's son, Zeph, can outsmart him any day. Zeph's got it in for you, too, Davey, so you keep your eyes peeled."

"I'll do that," Dave promised, his hand reaching for the familiar coin-like tag that dangled from his shirt pocket. He rolled a smoke, easily, leisurely, but his muscles were hard beneath the blue flannel shirt, and the corners of his mouth twitched to tautness. What he had seen he did not want his grandfather to guess: the lone rider who was cutting across the upper Purdy range toward a narrow pass that opened only into the desert beyond.

Dave's eyes flashed a little in secret amusement. His grandfather was trying to keep him out of this new Purdy war—that's why he was hurrying him to make this trip—and there rode a Purdy, bound for the same lonely country toward which Dave himself was headed!

He gave a quick nod of comprehension. The Purdys wanted *Dave* to make the trip, instead of his grandfather, so they had stopped the older man with a bullet. Of their reasons, Dave could guess

nothing; only that they were sinister, and meant grave danger to himself.

In his heart he was glad they were carrying the fight away from Luke, but instinctively his mind checked over his ammunition, his guns. He must be prepared for any treachery. Every clump of mesquite or cactus big enough to hide a man would be a cause for suspicion, since the Purdys never chose to fight in the open. They never had, through all the fifty or more years Luke Rutherford had hated them.

"I'll be on the lookout," Dave said again, "and you do likewise. Keep Niko here, close!" he nodded toward the old breed who had been house boy for years. "Remember, they've got you off your horse, man!" and he grinned.

"I'm still worth two Purdys!" Luke flared.

Except for the leg that had stopped a bullet last night, Luke did seem a match for two ordinary men. People who did not know guessed his age full twenty years short of its real sixty-eight. He rode, worked, held his own with far younger men.

"Even with a youngster like you to worry about, I get along!" But his lean face was filled with pride as he stared at this dauntless grandson of his.

WELL, I'll get started so you can begin your worryin'."

Dave said, and threw away his cigarette. He didn't want that other rider to get too much of a start. Coming over to the older man, he held out his hand. Luke clasped it in wordless affection.

"Maybe all this seems plumb foolish to you, Davey," he said, "searchin', the desert for a family that's been lost for more than fifty years.

But I've got to do it. I promised myself that."

"I'm as hot on the mystery as you, granddad," Dave answered gravely. "I've grown up on the story of Black Purdy and his band plunderin' your wagons, and killin', when you were crossin' the desert so many years ago—and all my life I've wondered about the one wagon load that disappeared. Now I've a queer feelin' that I'm about to stumble on some clew of the Quinn party. The wind storms have been heavy lately; maybe the shiftn' sands will uncover somethin', the way they did that old bureau of Drusilla Quinn's, so long ago."

"Ah, that bureau! If only I could know its secret before I die! Doubtless it was put off to lighten the load, but how they ever got so far off the trail through the heavy sand, I can't imagine." He sighed. "I hope you can find somethin', Davey—even their bones. It would be a relief just to know."

Dave nodded. "This year I'm goin' straight to the ridge and start my search. Maybe I'll work into the bad lands a ways. We've never searched in that direction much."

"Barnaby Quinn would never have been so foolish as to enter those bad lands; none would have lived if he had—not through the sand storm that came right after. So don't venture into the breaks, Davey. It's no use. And watch that Jerushy burro. She'll drift a mile."

"I'll watch!" Dave promised as he strode across the porch, mounted the black mare, and took the pack burro's reins. "Come on, Jerushy! We're desert bound. 'By, granddad!" And he rode away, smiling grimly.

Luke Rutherford settled back in his chair, relieved at thus removing his grandson so easily from one path

of danger; but as Dave traveled away toward the desert his face grew sober. He realized that the boy was riding to keep an appointment with danger from another angle—perhaps with death.

One of the devil's spawn would be waiting for Dave out there, and before another morning dawned, only he—or Dave, alone—would ride back to Starvation Springs.

A feud that had been started more than fifty years ago, on that same desert, would be ended. Dave knew, instinctively, that if he never returned, the Purdys could soon wipe out the crippled, broken-hearted old man that Luke Rutherford would become. On the other hand, with one of the Purdy clan gone, Dave could soon send the other after him.

Before this trip was done, *finis* would be written with bullets.

CHAPTER II.

BACK TRAILS.

THE morning was clean and young as Dave Rutherford turned into the well-worn trail that led from Starvation Springs across the desert. As he rode, his mind went back more than half a century to a tale he knew, from frequent hearing, as well as if he had lived it.

He went, back to the day, more than fifty years ago, when, over this same trail, a slim, travel-stained lad of twelve had once ridden, to burst upon a group of camped emigrants at the springs and tell them of bandits who had fallen upon his people back in the desert. They had robbed and killed and plundered, young Luke Rutherford had sobbed out; only Barnaby Quinn's wagon load had escaped, and they must have help quickly. They had captured the bandit leader as prisoner, and

were holding him as hostage in case the plunderers returned; but they had little water and ammunition, only one horse, and a load of helpless children.

Over this same road young Luke had led men back—to find no trace of the missing wagon. Not even the trail of its going showed, for the wind had been blowing, scattering the fine alkali dust, to drift in streaks over any footprints or wagon ruts.

That the boy's tale was not utterly fantastic had been proved by the traces of burned wagons, but the rest of his story about the wagon load that had disappeared, came to be discounted. His head had been a bit turned by the tragedy, they decided, and were kind to him, as he hung around the springs, hoping for word to come from Barnaby Quinn and his party.

Then "Black" Purdy had appeared, sitting his horse as boldly as you please. Luke had jumped to his feet, crying out in his shrill boy's tones:

"There he is! The bandit leader! He killed my mother! He——"

They had laughed at him then. "Why, that's Black Purdy!" they'd explained to the lad. "He owns a big ranch up in Starvation Valley. He came here early and holed into the best spot, so the rest of us have to travel on before we settle down."

Again they had laughed; Black Purdy and the kindly emigrants.

"I tell you, he's the one!" Luke had cried out in his frenzy. "He led them, I say! He clubbed my mother with the butt of his gun! I saw him! I——"

It had taken force to hold the fury-crazed youth back from Black Purdy, but they could not keep him from shaking his scrawny fists at the

grinning, bearded face and shrieking his defiance.

"I'll get you yet!" he'd vowed. "If it takes me a lifetime!"

That was the reason Luke Rutherford had stayed on at Starvation Springs, camping there, earning his keep by selling fresh wild meat to the emigrants as they came through, and by watching their cattle while the weary men rested.

He was never penniless, for under his camp was buried a beltful of gold—the money Barnaby Quinn had been bringing with him to start life anew in the West. Barnaby had put the money in the saddlebags when he sent the boy for help.

"It'll do us no good here," he had explained, "and you can hide it away until we come. Use whatever you need, lad."

Luke had hidden the gold away, holding it for the Quinns in case he should find them again. It was when he was fifteen that he had seen the opportunity for a trader at Starvation Springs. Digging up Barnaby's gold, he had used it carefully, cleverly, and had kept religious count, from that day to this, of every penny made from the borrowed capital. The original amount was put away for Barnaby, along with half of all the profits. Even at that, Luke Rutherford was now a rich man in a land of plenty; rich enough to push the Purdys back more and more each year, and to flaunt in their faces his hatred of them in the name of his trading post—the Burnt Wagons. And it was Luke who had finally killed Black Purdy.

EACH year, when early summer brought the anniversary of the vicious attack, Luke had made his trip into the desert to search for some trace of the Quinn party. He traveled alone at first,

then, as the years passed, with his son, and finally his grandson. But it was as if the desert sands had swallowed them and kept their secret. Only once had the quest brought results; that was the time they stumbled upon the old Quinn bureau, scoured clean of paint, but still intact; the drifting sands had covered it, then uncovered it again.

They had found the bureau several miles from the spot where Luke had left them on the trail; now he would never rest until he had solved the mystery of their going so many miles, taking the wagon with them—with a single horse, a man, and a boy to carry the load.

"And the Purdys have seemed just as anxious, for some reason," Dave mused as he hurried the stocky black mare along. "Anyhow, they've been mighty interested in our trips." His face grew grim, hard. "They got dad. Now they're out to get me."

He had come over the hogback of the ridge, ready to drop down into the desert. Stopping Half Pint, the mare, he looked toward the north, where the pass opened from the Purdy ranch. Somewhere in that direction an enemy lurked; an enemy who was probably watching him this minute.

Dave shrugged and sent Half Pint along. So far he had the advantage. He knew that his enemy prowled close and could bait him on until he was ready to turn upon him. Soon he turned off the trail, working along a winding draw that led into the desert, toward a landmark that marked where the bureau had been found. Once he left Half Pint and Jerushy and climbed to a ridge, where he saw what he expected: a cloud of dust moving down from the pass. That meant there was no immediate danger of attack. The Purdy who rode

out there intended to cut him off, near the landmark. Purdy would reach the spot first; he'd be lying in wait when Dave made camp that night.

"Come on, you two!" he said when he was again in the saddle. "The best we can hope for now is to get there before dark. No Purdy ever struck in broad daylight."

Dave reached the landmark just short of sunset, and stopped behind the shoulder of the dunelike ridge that jutted from the monotonous roll of sage and cactus, dotted now with a few bright flowers—remains of the brilliant carpet of bloom that was laid upon the desert at spring-time.

He fed and watered the animals, but neither unsaddled the mare, nor took the pack from Jerushy. He might need them hastily. He hobbled Jerushy, taking no chances on the itchy-footed burro going adrift, but he turned Half Pint free. She was an intelligent beast who would stay close and come at his whistle.

These chores done, Dave came back to camp at a crawl, hugging the ridge that would shield him. Motionless, he crouched there, his keen eyes scanning every inch of the landscape, to make sure that each twilight shadow lay alone, blended with no skulking figure. Then, assured that no enemy watched from this side, he crawled slowly over the ridge, to watch any approach from there. Flat on his stomach he lay, peering over the top, but, as his eyes grew used to the increasing shadows, his body tensed. Almost he forgot caution in straining his gaze over that changed landscape.

The wind storms had done their work well; the country looked fresh-scoured. At the foot of the long slope lay a queer, black, wall-like formation of stone, that had not

been there any year before, when Dave had looked upon the country. In that wall was a gap, opening like a gate into the bad lands.

FOR a long time Dave lay there, not daring to move because of the enemy that lurked near at hand, but his muscles quivered in eagerness, and his hand clutched a gun butt anxiously. He wanted now to get Purdy quickly, for beyond that killing lay the right and the freedom to explore that gap.

In some way Dave felt sure that the answer to the long mystery would be found beyond there. The Quinn wagon had reached this far those fifty-odd years before. The abandoned bureau had proved that. And if Barnaby had seen the gap, as Dave saw it now, he would make for it. Luke hadn't explored those bad lands very far, because it hadn't seemed humanly possible for the exhausted little band to go far beyond this point, with so little water, but their bones must lie somewhere beyond that queer wall!

The sun sank and darkness gathered. Then the moon climbed out of a cup between the distant purple hills, and the whole world was flooded with eerie light. Stars came, too, so close that they took on the third dimension. They were balls of fire, hanging low, instead of flat disks against a blanket of sky.

The squat shadows along the sands became fixed. Not a living thing moved. After a time Dave raised his head, and still there was no stir. With his head up, clearer vision of the gap came, and Dave drew in a deep, quick breath—for there, visible under the flooding moonlight, was something rising out of the sands; something shaped like a wagon bed!

Dave was young and he was im-

pulsive. For three hours he had lain rigid without sighting his enemy. Inaction was no longer to be borne. He took a final look around, let a stone roll down the slope, slithering through dried sage. He heard not a sound, saw no movement, anywhere.

Dave hesitated only a second more. It didn't seem possible that his enemy slept, yet there had been not the slightest stir to betray any alien presence. Purdy might be, at this minute, circling around to creep up on the camp from the other side. Well, in that case, Dave told himself, Purdy would be kept busy while Dave did a little investigating on his own account. The final fight would keep for a few hours.

Slowly, very cautiously, Dave stretched his cramped muscles over the sand as a sluggish snake crawls. Down the long slope he went, and along the wall. Faster and faster, with caution almost gone as he neared the gap and no bullet had whizzed through the night.

For a moment he lay still at the edge of the gateway, and his eyes brightened as he verified his vision from above. It was part of a covered wagon! There was no mistaking it. White as driftwood, a plank and part of a broken bow rose from the sands. And, beyond, as he craned his neck to see around the strange wall created by nature, he noted the wagon seat, standing like another monument among all those grotesque rocky tombstones of the impassable bad lands. The broken remains of a covered wagon—and what other wagon, save that of Barnaby Quinn, would be here, miles off the trail?

His eagerness could be restrained no further. Dave crawled inside, over to the wagon. He pulled the broken bow loose from the sand, ex-

amined it, then walked over to the wagon seat. There were marks in its smooth surface; a lighted match showed a crude jackknife carving. *Luke*. His grandfather's name!

There was a tight lump in Dave's throat as he thought of the twelve-year-old boy, jogging over the rough hard trail, proudly flourishing a new knife. Luke had liked Barnaby; often, during the long journey across the plains, he had gone to sit in the Quinn wagon. Dave knew all these things, because Luke had spoken so often of the trip that Dave felt as if he himself had been there.

Other things Dave remembered of the tale. When Black Purdy pursued the fleeing wagon, from this same seat the boy Luke had leaped into the bandit's gun, bringing the big man to the ground and enabling Barnaby to jump down and take him prisoner. Across these old boards, then, the boy had been laid, with the bruise of Black Purdy's fingers about his throat, for death had almost come, before Barnaby Quinn had reached them.

Dave's eyes felt strangely misty as he crouched there in the moonlight, rubbing a hard palm over the old wood that was sand-planed to satin smoothness.

Suddenly he stiffened. One hand started toward his gun at the sound of a chuckle behind him, but a harsh voice halted the move.

"Lift 'em up! And keep 'em up!"

CHAPTER III.

A PURDY STRIKES.

DAVE RUTHERFORD spat a curse as, very slowly, he raised his hands toward the near stars. He deserved what he was getting—for letting himself be baited into the trap of the enemy.

Rough hands unloosed his gun belts, slung them to the ground, far behind. The muzzle end of a gun swung him around until he was facing the swarthy, vicious face of the youngest of the Purdys: Zeph, only surviving grandson of old Black Purdy.

"Well, Zeph," Dave greeted him. "You did yourself proud, didn't you?"

Zeph Purdy's teeth shone whitely from his black-bearded, hawk-nosed face, and his reddish eyes gleamed like a cat's under the moonlight. All the Purdys had those odd eyes; it helped to give each the look of a demon.

Dave measured him, narrowly. A bulky man was Zeph, shorter than Dave, but with wide, bull-like neck and shoulders, and powerful torso. He had the advantage of perhaps thirty pounds in weight. He wore two guns; twin belts, crossed in front, with the holsters strapped down tight to his thighs, killer-fashion.

"When I seen these wagon relics, I knowed you'd stop," he boasted to Dave. "I had gumption enough to get you the smart way—out here alone."

"Then it was you who shot granddad!" Dave said sharply. "We knew it was a Purdy—nobody else hereabouts would dry-gulch a man like that—but we weren't sure which one."

"I'd have finished him off, easy, but I left him for pa," Zeph replied, grinning. "Pa's got a score to pay off. Old Luke got grandpop and my two uncles and my brother!"

"The score still isn't evened up on our side!" Dave retorted grimly. "It won't be evened until every last Purdy is wiped from the face of the earth."

"You're talkin' mighty big for a man up a tree, ain't you? And it's a different kind of speech than I'm hankerin' to hear from you!"

"I've no kind of talk to exchange with a Purdy—except the kind you send with bullets!"

"I reckon you'll talk!" Zeph's voice was a rasp. "You see, there's things that need clearin' up. You're goin' to tell the things that grandpop died cravin' to know. Me, I'm smarter than him, or dad. What I want to know I find out. And right now I'm wantin' to know where you and old Luke has got the gold cached that belonged to Barnaby Quinn!"

Dave stared at him steadily. "You're loco, Zeph," he declared.

"Don't try that stuff on me!" Zeph spoke from deep in his throat, as if he were growling. His gun leveled, menacingly. "I'm no fool. You've got a secret cache somewhere out here! Grandpop knew it—that's how old Luke got his start. It's why you Rutherfords could always cut such a wide swath with money! Now you're goin' to tell me where that Quinn gold is hid—so make ready to talk, hombre!"

Dave considered for a moment. When he spoke, his words came slowly.

"Why are you so sure we have a cache out here, Zeph? What made your grandfather think such a thing?"

Zeph stared at Dave. "Because the Purdys ain't fools!" he cried out. "Say! You don't think we'd have let you live on all this time, do you, if we hadn't knowed you had the gold out here—and was bound to come for it? We could have finished you both easy, any time, like we done your pa—only this way was best."

IT was Dave's turn to stare as he struggled for comprehension. This, then, was the reason the Purdys had let Luke live so long, had taken so much interest in the yearly trips. It was not in them to understand the loyalty of a man who would continue to seek a friend after fifty years, especially when it meant giving him back gold that belonged to him. Nor could they comprehend the compassion that would make a man suffer because he couldn't gain any definite knowledge of a friend's passing. To them the yearly searching trips could mean nothing but gain, and thus a legend had grown in the Purdy family, fed by their greed and ignorance.

"You ain't foolin' me," Zeph repeated. "Somewheres out here you got that gold cached. And I'm goin' to have it."

"Why should I tell you anything?" Dave demanded. "I'd only get a bullet after I'd spilled the news, which is the same as I'll get, anyhow."

"Mebbe not!" Zeph's reddish eyes narrowed under their thick lids. "I'm willin' to bargain. Your life for the gold. Then I'll leave these parts with the money. The world's wide enough for the two of us."

"And you think I'm fool enough to swallow that!" Dave scoffed. He must do anything to gain a little time and hope for something to arise that would shift the advantage between them. "Think I'll believe that you'll turn me loose when your father's still back in Starvation? That would mean granddad and me against a lone Purdy!"

Zeph shrugged indifferently. "Pa has muddled this thing long enough. And if he can't look after himself, let him take what he gets. But that ain't the point!" He twirled his gun suggestively. "Where's the gold?"

"Now I know you're loco!" Dave exclaimed.

"I told you to keep off that trail!" Zeph ordered roughly. "Come across with what I want to know, or I'll——"

"Or what?" Dave broke in, suddenly tired of the strain. "I've got nothing to say!"

Denial of the gold would do no good; there was nothing that could do him any good now unless the goddess of luck gave him some slight instant of advantage. For that he prayed.

"So you ain't talkin'!" Zeph boomed out. "Well, you'll have a little time to think it over!" Then he ordered shortly: "Walk over there to that butte—the one that looks like a tombstone."

"They all look like tombstones," Dave said. "Enough markers here for a graveyard of Purdys." But he turned and strode slowly toward the designated place.

THERE was no need to resist; not when Purdy had the drop on him. But suddenly hope grew. When he reached those shadows at the base of the butte he could act; take a quick leap to one side, then behind the rock. Whichever way Zeph Purdy came, Dave could jump in the other direction and reach another butte. And if the moon went under a cloud there would be opportunity for escape—or he might reach his gun belts, where Zeph had thrown them.

Dave felt an urge to quicken his pace, but he kept to the same even gait—one, two, three. Just another two steps and he would be there.

Then the world shattered. There was the bark of a six-gun behind, the ping of a bullet through the air, the stinging impact of lead against his back ribs, sending him downward.

Before he could recover, another shot came, and he felt it tear through the left thigh, bearing down toward his knee, numbing it, sending him toppling to the ground.

"Got you!" Zeph gloated. "Just like I nipped your grandpop—in the leg. Right where I wanted to."

"You devil!" Dave spat out. "You Purdy scum!"

"Thought you'd catch me nappin', didn't you?" Zeph grinned, came closer. "You ought to've knowed better."

"I should have known you'd shoot from behind when I was unarmed!"

Dave gritted back the pain as he tried to rise from the bloodstained ground. His shirt was already wet, and blood was spurting from his leg. In spite of that, he reached out an arm, caught Zeph Purdy's ankles, jerked him down.

Zeph was quick. He rolled over like an eel and was up to his knees. His gun arm raised, came down with fiendish fury.

Dave felt it graze his head, that hard gun butt. A million stars whirled in buzzing anger about him; the world tipped and swayed. Then he plunged off into a cold, abysmal blackness.

CHAPTER IV.

JERUSHY DRIFTS.

IT seemed to Drusie Bright that, during the night, young summer had run through the Canyon of Sweet Waters like a slim girl trailing a filmy green scarf behind her—like a dancing maid in an old print that hung in her great-grandfather's cabin. The canyon was always green, but there had been a new mistiness about it this day; perhaps because the cottonwoods had dropped the last of their white cottony fluffs and come freshly into full leaf.

A place of beauty was this small gulch, lashed out of the arid bad lands they knew as Satan's Graveyard, but to Drusie Bright there was no beauty in the world as she knew it.

A small world it was—that Drusie knew—compassed by the sheer rocky canyon walls, marked by a small stream that rose from springs in one blind end of the gully, disappearing strangely into the other boxed extremity—and peopled by the forty-odd souls who inhabited the canyon. Drusie Bright had known no other world, nor had her family for three generations before her. Her horizon was bounded by the jagged buttes and breaks of the bad lands, stretching on every side from the rock rim above.

Drusie was at the pottery alone as evening came. She liked to be alone. It gave her time to think, time to let her resentment against life grow, time to hate the confining rocky walls that kept her from the world she instinctively sensed to be outside.

When she heard steps beyond the bend she bent her head, with its two dark braids, lower over the bowl she was holding to the wheel, surely and steadily, for shaping.

"Good evening, Drusie!" It was Barnaby Quinn, patriarch of the canyon, and her own great-grandfather. "You're working late, child. The sun has already set."

Her slim-sandaled foot did not hesitate in its quick beat at the treadle. She only raised her brown eyes a moment to look at him as he stood there, leaning on his staff; white-haired, white-bearded, his ancient bones warmed by goatskin trousers and vest. Beside him was a shaggy yellow dog.

"I like this part of the day best, grandsire," she replied briefly.

"And I want to get things out of the way." She nodded toward the neat pile of dishes, some through the kiln, others ready for the first firing.

Barnaby picked up a completed pitcher, pure of line and gracefully shaped. "Beautiful work, Drusie, these dishes for your sister's new home. They'll be completed before young Gid gets the cabin ready."

"I want to get them out of the way," she repeated. "Jenny will be happier, knowing they're ready." Scorn was on her tanned, elfinlike face. "Perhaps it will make the time of waiting seem shorter."

BARNABY seated himself upon a well-worn boulder, and she felt his keen gaze upon her. "So Jenny's getting married," he mused. "She and young Gideon are building a home together."

"Yes—and acting as if it were the most important thing that ever happened!"

Barnaby Quinn smiled, and smoothed his long white beard.

"You'll feel that way yourself, Drusie," he told her, "once you find which likely young man you'll choose. And it's time you thought about it, child. You're twenty years of age. Jenny is two years younger, and she's settling down."

A little thread of fear crept into Drusie's heart. Her great-grandfather had always arranged the marriages; he had stopped, with a sharp warning, any friendship that was apt to grow too close between relatives who should not marry—and had encouraged other couples. When he said a girl was old enough to marry she accepted it as the law—all but Drusie herself. Old Barnaby had been lenient with her these past three years, but now—now there was something firm about his voice.

"Barney Quinn is not yet wed,"

he went on, his gaze still fixed keenly upon her. "Barney is your own age—just a few days younger—and he is a good worker. He is only your third cousin, and he has waited for you, Drusie; now he wants a home."

"Barney only wants what you tell him to want!" she cried out. "He waited because you told him to! But I'm not going to marry him!"

"What?"

All of the rebellion that had been surging in Drusie's heart ever since she could remember boiled up now. She took her foot from the treadle, stood facing him, slim and straight in her garment of woven grasses, banded at the waist with a snake-skin belt. Holding the bowl in her strong, small hands, she flung back her dark head defiantly.

"I'm not going to think about marriage at all, grandsire! Not to any one here! I'm not going to tie myself down to this canyon!"

"Where will you go?" Barnaby demanded harshly. "If you're not going to be tied down here, where will you go, child?"

"Where?" she echoed. Then she took a step or two nearer the old man, looked desperately into his white-bearded face, trying to pierce through to the knowledge he held. "You know where I could go, grandsire! You could even show me the way, if you would—the way you traveled when you came into Sweet Waters! And you've got to show me!" The bowl crashed to the ground as she threw herself to her knees before him. "If you don't tell me, grandsire, I'll find the way by myself!"

"You speak foolish words!" he boomed in a voice not at all aged. "And I will have none of it! You have seen the world outside this canyon. I have taken you up there, walked a way with you into Satan's

Graveyard to show you how easily and how cruelly you would be lost if you ventured too far alone. What would you do in an unkind world like that?"

"The world isn't all like that," she insisted, sitting back on her heels. "Oh, I've dreamed of things, grandsire! I know there are other places like this canyon, only larger. Places whence came all those things you treasure of my great-grandmother's—the lovely spoons, the copper kettles, the old shawl with its beautiful colorings. And the books I found hidden in your cabin and read. They tell of far places, grandsire! Even the Bible, from which I learned to read—it teaches of cities and journeyings forth, of precious jewels and silks and fine raiment, things such as we have not here in Sweet Waters. It speaks of peoples and pleasures of which we know nothing! You came from some spot beyond Satan's Graveyard, and I am determined to seek out that place, live there!"

Barnaby stood up. With one movement of his still strong arms, he reached down, jerked her to her feet.

"Cease this babble!" he ordered furiously. "This is your world! There is no way out—no other place we can reach! If there were, don't you suppose we would have gone long ago?"

Fearlessly she kept her steady gaze upon his face.

THEN you, too, have wished to go from here," she guessed, reading the secret that lay behind the pain in his blue eyes. "You've hated these walls, this small space, and you've longed to get back to the outside world again. It was the children—and my great-grand-

mother's grave that held you here, grandsire!"

"That will do!" Never had Barnaby Quinn needed to speak twice to any of the others. "This foolish talk—I will have none of it! And I know the remedy. Your marriage with young Barney Quinn will be celebrated on the same day that your sister, Jenny, weds with Gideon. We will build you a cabin, like your sister's, and——"

Barnaby stopped, his sentence unfinished. Drusie was staring at him from wide-opened eyes. Her mouth parted a little, then closed tightly, as if to shut away the stormy words that wanted to pour forth. Fury showed in every line of her small, tensed body, but she held her silence. Nobody in all the canyon dared say to Barnaby Quinn "I will not!" when he had once said "Do this!" It would have been the supreme discourtesy.

"I will tell Barney," the old man finished, "and you can make more dishes; to your own pattern this time." He turned away, stalked around the red clay bank and out of sight.

Drusie stared after him, quivering with rage and terror—the helpless panic of a trapped wild animal. Old Barnaby had always seemed like the one, of them all, who would understand, and now he had turned against her. He was making her stay here, to grow old within these canyon walls. He was turning the sweet waters to wells of bitterness, of which she must drink deeply.

She turned and ran, away from the direction her grandsire had taken. Without troubling to remove her sandals, she plunged recklessly into the stream and across—scattering a pair of fawns by her wild approach. Down the canyon she ran, away from the settlement, her grass

skirt catching on the bushes, tearing her bare limbs as she began to climb the worn trail that led to the rock rim above.

At the top she threw herself down, sobbing, staring with rebellious eyes into the bad lands, straining through the twilight to see the mystery that lay beyond. It had always fascinated her, that new world. She had come here often with old Barnaby and had asked him many questions—questions that, roughly, he always told her to cease asking. But that had done no good; not even when he had found her reading his Drusilla's books, which told of strange lands and doings, and had taken them away from her to hide. Drusie Bright had gone on wondering, dreaming, sensing that her great-grandfather lied when he said the books were fairy tales, that no such reality existed.

She had not even believed him when he took her with him one day, straight into Satan's Graveyard, walking with her for hours upon end, until she was faint with exhaustion, perishing from thirst, and feverish from the brassy sun—and he had had to carry her back to the canyon.

"If we had kept going," she had told him gravely when the fever and the weariness had left her, "then we would have come to the end of the hard way, grandsire—and found what we were seeking!"

"Drusilla!" he had ejaculated, his eyes staring at her strangely. "Drusilla——" And she had felt queerly herself, for that was the only time Barnaby Quinn had ever called her by the name of his beloved wife.

HE was still trying to make her believe that no world existed out there; he was trying to make her forget everything else outside the Canyon of Sweet

Waters. If she married Barney Quinn, she would be tied here—just as Barnaby himself had been tied—and could never know what lay on the far rim of the earth, beneath the domed sky.

"I've got to know!" she cried, clenching her hands into small hard fists. "I've got to!"

The sun set, and still Drusie lay there, sobbing. The moon rose like a great ball, and the close stars sprinkled the sky. Drusie shivered with the night cold, but she made no move to go down. If once she went back into the canyon she would stay forever——

The moon was high when she rose to her knees and sat there rigid at the sound of something coming through the breaks. And when a long-jawed, drooping gray head appeared around a butte, followed by a stocky, shaggy body, Drusie gave a low little scream—for never had she seen anything like it. Larger than a buck deer it was, and without the deer's quick grace; on either side of its back hung a big bundle, dusty and lumpy. The animal had no horns; its ears were very long and large, shaped much like a rabbit's, and through the dim moonlight it eyed her with a sagacious, wary expression she had never seen before on any beast. The canyon animals were more curious than wise.

Drusie wanted to run, but fear had not been taught the children of Sweet Waters. She held her ground, and after a moment the beast came toward her, making queer noises in its throat. Straight up to her it walked, looked at her with great eyes that were humanlike and sad.

"You're thirsty," Drusie said, putting a hesitant hand upon its head. "And wounded," she added as she saw the thick handle of a knife sticking from one pack.

The beast was not wounded. The knife had only gone into the pack, as Drusie saw when she pulled it out. All the same, there was something sinister about it. Drusie recognized it as a hunting knife, akin to the two that were treasured in the canyon below: one had been Gideon Bright's and the other belonged to Barnaby Quinn himself. This handle was covered with rawhide, palm-polished to smoothness. On one side, burned in deep letters, was a name: "Purdy."

A cold feeling of terror crept through Drusie, and the night was suddenly pressing in upon her with fearsome intent. Drusie had a vague memory of having heard that name, Purdy, and of knowing it to be evil; the echo of it came like the memory of a horrible dream. Old Barnaby had uttered it at times when he sat cleaning the gun he never fired, examining the bullets he never used. Her own grandfather, Gideon Bright, had spat it out once like a curse when a child of his lay ill, needing help the canyon could not give.

Drusie's eyes grew wide, and she shrank back from the shaggy-coated beast that had brought this first message from the outside world: the message that was also a vicious, outspoken threat.

Yet—it was a message. Behind the nameless animal she saw its new tracks, showing darkly on the sands under the midnight moon: a trail that stretched back to the spot from whence it came; a trail that was not yet wiped out by the shifting, treacherous sands.

Drusie reached out, caught the halter with one firm hand. The gray face muzzled her; its nose twitched under the close scent of water.

"Of course, you're thirsty," the girl said in pity. "Well, come, then."

SHE led it down the trail, into the canyon, where every human seemed asleep; but, remembering the trail that led backward across Satan's Graveyard, she led the beast quietly. At the bottom she turned away from the settlement and went up the canyon to a spot she had claimed as her own: a tiny glade where the stream widened to a pool.

The animal drank deeply. It would have waded in, but Drusie held it back till she could loose the packs from its back. And, as she fumbled with buckle and knot, her hands trembled, and her thoughts raced at realization that some other human hand had put these things in place. Curiously, she opened the packs, spread the contents upon the grass, examined them by the bright moonlight.

There was a woven blanket; Drusie recognized it from the precious ones in her great-grandmother's chest, brought out only to cover the newborn and the dying. There was a garment of softer woven stuff, such as Drusie had never seen. It was a shirt, she finally decided, although it was like none of the canyon men's shirts. And there was a soft pair of moccasins, also made of woven stuff, and coming high above her ankles when she tried them on. She laughed at the foolishness of them; they wouldn't help a bit when it came to traveling a rough trail.

The food pack she examined next. Salt she recognized; a precious salt lick up near the springs gave the canyon folks their supply. They poured water upon it, carried the brine to the settlement, and let it evaporate. The meal, too, was familiar to Drusie. Corn they grew, and ground at the crude water mill near the pottery. She examined closely a parcel of fat smoked meat;

the smell of it was delicious, and made her nostrils twitch in pleasure. And she liked the pungent odor of some coarsely ground, dark-brown stuff marked "Coffee" that she found in a silver-colored receptacle with a removable lid. But when she tasted the substance it was bitter to her tongue.

There were other small receptacles that had no lids. Drusie exclaimed in vexation as she tried to find the secret opening, but there was none. She guessed that each contained food because of the pictures on papers wrapped around the outside—very beautiful colored pictures of cooked beans and a bright-red fruit which she did not recognize. She spelled out the words that told the contents: "T-o-m-a-t-o-es—S-o-l-i-d P-a-c-k." But the words made no sense. Anyhow, of what possible use was food so securely wrapped up?

One of the cylindrical containers had the picture of an animal on its paper wrap: a beast with horns like a deer and a head something like the gray-faced one that had nibbled at the grass and was now lying down. She read the printing beneath. Evidently this was milk! But milk came from goats—and this was not the picture of a goat! Besides, milk soured in a very short time, and how could it be put into a container with no opening?

In the bottom of the pack she found another round, battered container with a removable top. Inside was a coarse powder with the sweetness of honey, of which the canyon people had plenty. Drusie tasted it again and again.

AT last she wanted no more. She gathered the things together and threw the pack coverings over them, but the knife, sinister and sharp, lay uncovered upon the

ground, and Drusie stared down at it, shivering.

Strangely, that knife brought to her memory many things—fearful things: the wedding day that would come closer with each dawn, and the new trail that the beast had opened. It filled her with strange terror, too, of the great unknown that might lie at the end of the trail.

She stood there for a moment longer, hands clenched to rigidity; then she looked upward, her eyes following the slanting trail that led to the rock rim, beyond which lay that beaten path of hoof marks that led through Satan's Graveyard to some world outside.

With the morning breeze, those tracks would begin to fill; they would be lost. Within the next short space of time lay Drusie's only opportunity to escape the pressing canyon walls. She had to choose now, this hour, between the small world here, familiarly comfortable, and whatever exciting—even dangerous—things that lay beyond, near the far rim of the earth.

She caught the animal's halter. Without looking back, stopping only from sheer instinct to pick up the small canteen of water that lay beside the pack, she started up the trail.

They came over the rock rim. Catching up a branch of sagebrush dropped by somebody from below, and remembering pictures she had seen in the forbidden books, Drusie clambered to the sturdy back of the beast, whacked it on the rump, and they started over the dusty trail that led away.

Just once Drusie looked back, and saw the print of their going behind her. The morning breeze would soon cover that; the way between herself and the canyon would be blotted out forever. She set her chin

a little more firmly, and whacked the beast again.

Like a mocking farewell, the cry of a lone coyote rose, bansheelike, and filled the world with a thousand eerie, wailing echoes.

CHAPTER V.

THE CRIMSON TRAIL.

IT was still night when Dave Rutherford came out of the nightmare that possessed him. For a moment he couldn't place himself, couldn't remember how he came to this land of breaks and weird rock structure that looked unearthly under the bright full moon.

Then he remembered and tried to sit upright, but the pain in his thigh and knee dizzied him; weakness made him ill. Fever burned high in his veins, he knew. He realized then that the ground beneath him was wet with blood, although his wound was crudely though efficiently bandaged with his own kerchief. Zeph Purdy must have done that.

"He didn't want me to die right away!" Dave told himself as he gritted his teeth against the weakening pain. "That means that he'll be back. He thought I couldn't move."

He had to move. If he could reach the near-by brakes, some ten yards away, he could hide himself, at least. "Crawl away like a dog to die!" he told himself grimly, for he had no hope of doing more than escape Zeph Purdy. With no guns, no water, and a burning fever from his wound, there was little hope of surviving far into the day, after the sun became a burning brassy ball in the sky, and the rocks reflected the heat in searing gusts. But, at least, he could keep Zeph Purdy from having the satisfaction of sending the final bullet into him, to end his life.

Straining every muscle, struggling

until the veins on his forehead stood out like whipcord, Dave dragged his wounded leg along. An inch at a time he went, every part of that inch sheer torture to the shattered kneecap. Twice nausea gripped him, but he set his teeth and fought through it, with sweat drenching him.

After what seemed hours, he turned his head, stared back—and saw the bloody trail he was leaving. Despair blackened his heart. Zeph could follow that scarlet track as easily as any marked highway. What use, then, to go on?

Just as Dave's head sank to his arms, in utter surrender, he heard a sound—a blessedly familiar sound. It was Jerushy's impatient bray.

"Jerushy!" Dave called hoarsely, and hope flared anew. If the burro were near, perhaps Half Pint was, too. He might be able to send the mare home, riderless; his grandfather would understand and get help to him. It would probably be too late, but there was a faint chance.

He whistled the signal that always brought the little mare, but this time there was no answering beat of hoofs. Dave tried again, louder. Zeph might be near enough to hear it, but he had to take that chance. Still there was no sign of Half Pint, only Jerushy's voice, once more.

"Come here, then, Flea-bit!" he called wearily, fighting the dizziness that came in increasing waves. He had no real hope; Jerushy seldom came when called. "Come here and I'll——"

He stopped, open-jawed, as the shadow of the burro loomed above him. Jerushy had come through the brakes, stood before him docilely. Dave lifted his eyes, then blinked in utter disbelief.

She couldn't be true, that girl who rode the burro; small, dark-haired, with woven-grass dress and doeskin-

sandaled feet. Under the moonlight he saw a necklace of softly gleaming pebbles—probably moonstones—that hung about her slender, graceful neck. He must be delirious—or perhaps this was the angel of death, come to get him.

"You—you found Jerushy!" he managed to mutter.

DRUSIE looked at him steadily from grave brown eyes. Those eyes reminded Dave, sharply, of young animals he had seen, curious but unafraid. She seemed interested in every detail of his looks, his clothes.

"You are hurt, sir!" she said when her gaze had taken in everything. She slipped from Jerushy's back, caught the canteen, sank to her knees before Dave. "Why are you thus bleeding? And here alone?" Her speech was quaint upon his ears.

"I'm wounded this way," he gasped, "because a gun-totin' rattler got the drop on me—and served me right!"

Her gaze was bewildered as she gave him water, then wet her hand and laid it upon his face. It was plain she hadn't quite comprehended. Again, through the heavy cold blackness that was once more seeping into his bones, Dave was sure that she must be some being from another world come to comfort him through his last hour. Some pure being, innocent, apart from all the Purdys in the world.

He jerked himself back to clear thinking. "You've got to get away from here!" he cried out. "Before he comes back you've got to go!" Horror filled him at thought of this lovely creature at the mercy of one like Zeph Purdy. "Please!" he gasped.

She shook her dark head with its

long, dark braids; the puzzled frown was still upon her face.

"It would be very wrong to leave you—hurt and alone. I couldn't leave without you, sir!"

He recognized the decision in her tones. "But you can't take me!" he objected. "There's no way, ma'am! We can't escape him. You'll have to get back on Jerushy and travel!"

Again she shook her head. "You can get on Jerushy," she said with quiet dignity. "I can walk, sir!"

"But where can we go?" he asked desperately. "We can't get through that gap yonder! If we did, he'd pounce on us. You see this wound?" he demanded roughly, laying his hand upon the bandaged leg. "Zeph did that—from behind. Shot when I was unarmed and had my back turned. Now you know what we're up against—why I want you to go while there's time."

She surveyed him with the same grave expression, but in the moonlight he saw fear clouding her brown eyes: fear and some other strange emotion that made her clench her small hands to fists as she stood up and looked at the trail of hoofprints that stretched around the nearest butte and into the bad lands.

"We'll have to go back, sir!" she whispered, and there was a queer haunting despair in her tones. "Quickly. Grandsire will know what to do, and the trail is still open."

"Where?" he asked. "The trail to where?"

"To the Canyon of Sweet Waters, sir," she told him quaintly. "It will be some trouble to get you on the Jerushy animal, but if you can help somewhat—"

She was so small, standing there in the moonlight amid the tombstonelike rocks; but, like an angel in a graveyard, she filled Dave's spirits with hope, sweetness.

"We can make it!" he said. "My guns—they're somewhere close—in my belts. Zeph threw them down and——"

"Perhaps these are what you seek, sir!" Drusie's dark eyes had spied a heap on the sand a little way off. "I will fetch them."

"If you'll bring Jerushy close," he said when she picked up the gun belts, "I'll pull myself up——"

HE couldn't pull himself up, although he tried. The blackness came down upon him while he was still trying. But later, when a brief spell of consciousness came to him, he was lying across Jerushy's swaying back, and the moon was high and small in the heavens. The girl led the burro, winding in and out among the endless rocklike formations of the bad lands.

"What's your name?" he managed to get out. It seemed very important to find out this girl's name. He might vanish again into blackness and never know. "Your—name?" he repeated fumblingly.

"Drusie!" she told him. "Are you all right, sir?"

"All—right!" he whispered huskily, trying to remember what else it was he should tell her. "All—right, Drusie! And I—I am—Dave. Dave——"

"Yes, Dave——"

But he could think no further. He did open one eye to find what made the queer clinking sound that beat upon his ears, and he gave a weary smile when he saw Jerushy wearing his two gun belts, like twin lockets about her neck. Then he sank back into a stupor from the pain of his wound and the jolting of Jerushy.

It would not have been bearable, that trip, had it not been for the girl

who walked ahead. Drusie. The name sounded somehow familiar, but Dave could not think clearly enough to place it. While he was still struggling for it, he drifted deeper into the darkness, where pain was almost forgotten.

Neither Dave, in his weakness, nor the girl, in her ignorance of wounds, knew that the bandage had slipped, that his lifeblood was slowly dripping down Jerushy's dust-coated side, to fall to the ground in a red line that marked their passage, clearly and truly, for the swarthy man who followed, perhaps a mile behind.

Zeph Purdy swore deep oaths as he trudged along in his high-heeled, cruelly spurred boots—walking, the better to see the crimson line, while his bay horse followed behind.

Like the serpent crawling into Eden, evil was slinking into the peaceful Canyon of Sweet Waters; viciousness and threat were following a bloody trail.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CANYON OF SWEET WATERS.

IT was past dawn when Drusie Bright came to the rock rim; the settlement below was already astir. Standing at the top of the trail for a moment, Drusie could see them. Below the pottery bend, young Gideon MacLean, her sister Jenny's betrothed, was digging up virgin soil with one of the two shovels the canyon possessed. Carefully he dug, for the shovel was ancient and precious, and kept for this first tilling. Next year he would plow the ground with a granite point lashed to a pole, bunching the muscles of his own brawny body to pull it; but, this first time, tradition gave him the use of the shovel.

Farther down, a group of women

sat in the shade and plaited dried tulle grasses into patterns, laughing and chatting as they worked. There was no commotion; evidently her absence had not been noticed.

Drusie paused an instant longer, considering. Then her eyes fell upon a shelter near her own pool: a mere shack it was, with a framework of brush covered with palm fronds; but it was close to water, it was isolated, and it had a comfortable pallet of goatskins inside. Drusie had fixed it so, because she liked to have a place to which she could slip away, a place where she could be alone while she dreamed. She could reach it unnoticed, and it would give shelter to this stranger until she could plan something for him.

She took no time for planning when she had reached the glade and started to help Dave down to the pallet. The sight of that blood-soaked bandage and his ghastly face frightened her as she had never known fear before. He didn't know her now; his pulse raced, and he stirred his fingers restlessly, muttering, in his delirium, a queer jumble of words.

She waited only to snatch a handful of cool leaves, wash them in the pool, then crowd them up under the bandage, to stanch the blood. Another bit of cool water to trickle between his dry lips and fall upon his face, and then she ran down the path pell-mell; swiftly, as if no weariness rode her young body after the long strain of the night.

Past Gideon MacLean, who was not alone now—for Jenny was there, her blond hair shining under the first rays of the sun, her good-natured face proud as she watched him work.

Young Barney Quinn was at his cabin, and he looked up hopefully as Drusie came running, but she only nodded and went on. At the

head of the cabin lanes stood the biggest one of all—the home that had been built for Barnaby Quinn's wife, Drusilla.

Old Barnaby was there. Relief sprang into his still keen blue eyes when he saw the girl, but his greeting was quiet.

"Good morning, Drusie. I walked down to the pottery a moment ago, but you weren't there."

"No, grandsire!" She met his eyes squarely. "I wasn't at the pottery this morning. I've been away—away from Sweet Waters—"

He caught her slim shoulder. "You went—into Satan's Graveyard?"

"Beyond it," she replied gravely. "Beyond it, and back again!"

"You lie, girl!" His grip tightened. "You couldn't go there and back afoot!"

"I rode one way, and—oh, grandsire, there is no time to explain!" she cried. "I brought back with me a man! A stranger who is sore hurt. You must come with me, grandsire; only you can help!"

FOR a moment he stared down into her desperate face; then, slowly, stumblingly, he followed her down the path. Not a word did they speak all the way back. Barnaby scarcely returned the respectful greetings of his descendants; it was as if he walked in a dream.

Around the bend they went, past the pottery, then along the path to the glade. There Barnaby stopped, staring at Jerushy, who had waded into the pool and was sloshing her head in the water as if she liked the sound of its splashing. The dust from her coat was forming a thin film upon the clear cool water.

"A burro!" Barnaby whispered. "A burro—here!"

He looked around dazedly, then saw the pile of things under the canvas. Silently he gazed, unmoving, and then he saw the knife that lay beside the canvas.

Striding over, he picked it up and turned it over. An oath ripped from his old jaws as he glimpsed the name burned into the cowhide-covered handle.

"Purdy!" he spat out, and the name was more of a curse than the other. "A Purdy—here!" His hard old hands clenched the handle of the knife. His eyes blazed like those of a madman from his parchmentlike face. "Where is he—this Purdy? Speak, girl!"

Instinctively Drusie sprang to the door of the shack, stood there, guarding it. Her arms were wide-spread, her head flung back.

"You shall not hurt him!" she panted. "You shan't!" Then her defiance dwindled. "Grandsire, this man is wounded. He is dying. The Bible from which you taught us all to read tells of the Good Samaritan who had compassion on the injured one—helped him! It——"

"But he was not helping a Purdy! An enemy——"

"The Bible teaches kindness—even to enemies, grandsire! No matter what this Purdy is to you, he is wounded—dying—at our door. Please, please, grandsire!"

The old man's hand relaxed. He lowered the knife, stuck it into his belt. Then he bent his great height and stalked into the shack.

"Aye, he is young, then!" Surprise quickened his words. "And he has not the swarthinness of Black Purdy. At least, not on his face."

Barnaby knelt stiffly beside the pallet; his fingers felt for the pulse. Drusie watched his grim face desperately.

"Is he—dying, grandsire?" she whispered at last.

"Probably not," he returned briefly. "Not, at least, from the wound. It has leeches him badly, but it's best for him to be rid of the bad blood of the Purdys! He——"

Dave opened his fever-glazed eyes, staring at them blankly while his tongue muttered an incoherent jumble.

"Tell me," Barnaby demanded, leaning close and speaking in authoritative tones. "Tell me! What is your name? Are you a son of Black Purdy?"

DAVE fixed his unknowing gaze upon Barnaby without speaking. Then Drusie crowded closer, leaning over him, and he turned his eyes to her and smiled.

"Are you Black Purdy's son?" Barnaby demanded loudly. "Answer!"

Dave scowled, tried to pull some fragment of thought from his fever-jumbled mind. "Not Black Purdy's son—grandson—Purdy—he——" The rest was an unintelligible mumble.

Barnaby straightened, and Drusie, staring at him, gave a little cry at the rage on his face. One of his hands went forth, touched the bandage.

"Grandsire!" She caught his wrist with frantic fingers. Her eyes were filled with horror. Never before had real rage come into the Canyon of Sweet Waters; never before had such a threat disturbed the peaceful calm of its living. "Grandsire!"

"Leave be!" he ordered roughly. "I am not of the stripe who kills a man when he's down!" Then: "Get gone, child! Go to the oak chest of your great-grandmother and fetch

the small roll of old linen and her scissors. Fetch turpentine and plantain leaves from the herb garden. Make haste, now!"

There was no need to tell Drusie to make haste. She did not even stop to peer at the forbidden treasures in the oak chest, as she would have done at any other time. She caught up the roll of linen—so precious that each small bit was saved and washed after being used on a wound—and the turpentine, crudely made from the pines at the head of the canyon. Then she hurried to pluck the herbs, and raced back to the shack where lay the injured stranger.

Barnaby Quinn was already washing the wound clean with water from a spring above the pool; he had stopped its bleeding with a tourniquet. He only nodded briefly as she laid the linen and green leaves beside him.

"You will help me, Drusie," he told her, and reached for the turpentine.

It took courage for Drusie to go through the ordeal, but her hands never trembled as she helped the old man catch the severed artery and tie it securely with palm-frond fibers—their only string. And when he drew the edges of the wound together and skewered the skin in place with clean thorns, she did not flinch, although her heart seemed beating at her throat, choking her, and every moan of pain the wounded man made was as if a hand had snatched the knife from her grand-sire's belt and stuck it into her heart.

At last, however, it was done. The wound was cleansed, turpented, closed up, with a pad of the cool green plantain leaves held in place by a roll of the linen.

Then Barnaby stood up. "You'll stay here for a time," he said

harshly, "then I'll send your Aunt Ruth to care for him. After she comes, you will stay away from this place. And while this Purdy is in our canyon, no person shall speak the name of any who live here. That is to be my law."

He stopped, sighed, and his face was suddenly troubled and weary-looking, as he stared down into her troubled, lovely face. Tiredly, he spoke:

"Ah, child, this spirit of yours, this wild recklessness that would not be confined. It has, indeed, brought evil upon us all!"

Then he was gone, his white head bowed, walking with bent shoulders, as if his years were heavily bearing him down.

Drusie sank beside Dave; trembling, her heart filled with a sickness such as she had never known before. Dave threw out his hand restlessly, and she caught it, held it between her own two cool palms, and was a little comforted by the tenderness that crept through her.

THE clanging of an iron spoon on the great soap kettle made her catch her breath. It was the signal for a gathering of the settlement. Drusie's hands held tighter to Dave's. Her grandfather was telling all the people who lived in Sweet Waters about Dave. What would he say? Would he make them hate Dave—as Barnaby himself did?

Breathlessly, Drusie waited, shivering, although the sun was pouring down in warm golden radiance, outside. The canyon seemed different all at once; it was a strange place, with a great dark cloud hanging over it.

"I don't care!" she whispered, her hands upon Dave's. "I'm glad—glad that I saved you!" Her breath

came in quick little jerks as she looked down at him, and remembered that he, too, would be held here.

Her head drooped a little, and she slept, for hers had been a sleepless night. The wounded man also slept, quieter since his hand rested within hers.

The people at the settlement listened to Barnaby Quinn, then stared at one another, wide-eyed; but when Barnaby had finished they went their several ways and did as he ordered, asking no questions. They scarce talked to one another, but worked in fearful silence, starting at every noise, watching every shadow. A pall heavier than any pall of death that had ever come to them hung over the Canyon of Sweet Waters.

High above, a man edged back from the rock rim on his belly, then—out of sight from below—sat up to wipe his grimy, swarthy face with a dusty bandanna. His feline eyes gleamed redly, and his thin, cruel mouth curved in a malicious grin.

"Great guns!" he muttered. "I've found it! Now all I got to do is find out where they keep the gold and get the lay of the land!" For, cunning as he was, Zeph Purdy's corroding greed had eaten into his wits.

His thoughts raced with visions of gold-filled caves as he slipped back to his tethered horse and began leading him to the upper end of the canyon, away from the settlement. He had a good view of the canyon from above. When he saw the gleaming springs below, with the heavy growth coming out of the seepage, he gave a nod of satisfaction, and led his horse down the narrow, circuitous path.

The tangled growth and untrampled grass gave evidence that people seldom came here. Removing the riding gear from his jaded horse, he

hobbled it in the lush feed around the springs. Then he ate from his pack, quenched his own thirst, and soaked some of the heat from his face and head before he took his bed roll and crawled under a heavy-leaved bush for sleep. Like a desert snake, Zeph Purdy was crawling away from the brassy heat of the sun high above.

CHAPTER VII.

SERPENT IN EDEN.

FOR five days and nights things moved with apparent quietness in the Canyon of Sweet Waters as a deep stream flows smoothly, despite a pulling, treacherous undercurrent.

In the upper end of the canyon, away from the settlement, Zeph Purdy waited and watched. From the rock rim above he spent hours looking down upon the busy scene, taking mental note of the number of men, their brawniness, watching for any move that would betray a hidden cache of gold. While he watched, his dormant imagination woke to picture wealth that lay in great golden piles, and his fingers curled in greed.

He couldn't quite comprehend the situation below; the people who stayed here, working, living, gathering gold, while the Rutherfords stayed outside and spent it; but that didn't worry Zeph. If people wanted to do loco things, so he reasoned, let them! All he cared about was that he had solved the mystery that had troubled his family for three generations.

There was no doubt in his mind that here was the place Luke Rutherford had come every year, that here was the real key to his wealth. And best of all, Zeph told himself gloatingly, the gold would belong to

him alone; not even his father would share in it.

"For I'm goin' to have it!" He swore vicious oaths as he made his cautious way back to his camp. "Even if there's more'n twenty men down below, a-workin'! I'm goin' to get it, and I'm goin' to give Dave Rutherford a bullet that'll finish him—along with anybody else that gets in my way! Him givin' me the slip like he did, as bad as he was wounded, while I'd gone to his camp to kill his mare and start the burro home with a Purdy knife in his pouch."

He chuckled silently. "Bet that knife'll give old Luke a good skeer, the old skinkint! He'll know who's on the trail of his gold, all right." He licked his lips as he planned on—and watched. "But he can't do nothin'!"

Thus Zeph Purdy waited, nurturing his greed until he was ready to strike, and until Dave Rutherford was able to stand up and be a target for another Purdy bullet.

Below, in the canyon, things went on as usual, despite the tension and the unaccustomed dread. Each carried on his work and made no comments about the sick stranger in the glade—for so had Barnaby Quinn decreed. Only Drusie Bright knew rebellion.

For five days Drusie kept away from the glade, working at the pot-tery on Jenny's dishes, waiting for Aunt Ruth MacLean to come by with some news of Dave.

"He's doing nicely," the older woman would say. "The fever is going."

On the fifth evening, young Barney Quinn came to Drusie as she waited. Barney was big, blond, and serious. He was slow of thought and movement. His brow was deeply lined already from trying to keep

pace with the faster-thinking people around him. His eyes held a queer mixture of sullenness and bewilderment, but no vision of wider worlds.

"Drusie, you should talk with me about the cabin," he observed after he had stood for a moment and watched her at the wheel.

She whirled on him. "What cabin?" she demanded.

OUR cabin. The one grandsire has told me to build. Gideon MacLean will be through with the shovel to-morrow, so I will start on the ground. But I want to know first about the cabin, the things you have planned."

She flung back her dark head. "Have I told you to build a cabin for me?"

He thought that over. "No," he admitted at last, "but we're going to be married."

"Are you sure?" she asked furiously.

Red stained his cheeks, and his square jaw set itself doggedly. "Yes, I'm sure," he snapped.

Drusie opened her mouth to speak further, but stopped as Aunt Ruth MacLean came along the path.

Aunt Ruth was a natural-born nurse who cared for all the canyon sick. She was a middle-aged woman, tall and slender, with deep-blue eyes and a beautiful, serene face. Today, for the first time, Drusie saw that she was truly troubled.

"It was easier when he lay quietly," she said with a sigh. "Now he asks many questions, and is always wondering why——" She paused abruptly.

"Wonders why I do not come?" Drusie broke in eagerly. "Has he asked about me, Aunt Ruth?"

"It makes no difference!" the older woman reproved. "You must keep him from your mind, Drusie!"

"Did Dave ask for me?" Drusie repeated. "Did he, Aunt Ruth?"

"Yes, but—child, what are you doing?"

Drusie was already kneeling at the creek's bank, washing the clay from her hands, smoothing her hair back. "I'm going to see Dave," she said quietly.

"But you must not!" Real alarm sounded in Aunt Ruth's tones. "Grandsire has forbidden it!"

"I'm going!" and Drusie slipped off her sandals, to wade through the brook.

Barney came to life then. He strode over, caught the girl's round, tanned arm.

"You can't go!" he told her harshly. "I won't have it! This man came here to make trouble for us all, and you shall not go near him. Do you hear?"

She stared at him for an instant, then jerked loose. Without troubling to speak, acting as if she were scarcely conscious of his existence, she plunged into the water, stopped on the far side to slip her slim feet into the doeskin sandals, then went running to the glade.

Dave was propped against a tree, with his injured leg stretched out before him. Jerushy grazed near by. Dave's gray eyes brightened when he saw her.

"So you're real!" he greeted her, and smiled. "Or maybe I'm still havin' fever dreams—sort of mirage-like dreams. Where have you been, if you're real?"

"Working at the pottery," she said gravely.

AT first speech was slow between them; they merely looked at one another, and then Dave pulled a thin sack and a packet of papers from his pocket.

"I'll have to be huntin' the com-

missary," he said after a while. "I'm down to my last sack of makin's." That much, at least, seemed real to him.

"Makin's?" she repeated, bewildered. "What are they, sir?"

He stared at her for a moment, then smiled again, as if he liked more than anything else to look into her wide brown eyes and watch the golden lights that played there.

"The wherewithal for cigarettes," he told her. "Tobacco, and such. Don't you know tobacco?"

She shook her head, but watched with interest while he rolled the cigarette and lighted it. Everything Dave did interested her; even the way he talked, dropping his g's and slurring his words together. Canyon children had never been allowed to do either, but she found it fascinating in Dave.

He began to ask idle questions then, more as if he wanted to hear her speech than anything else. She wondered if her own manner of speaking fell as strangely upon his ears as did his upon her own.

"I don't hear any cows," he observed, "and yet I get milk to drink."

"Why, the milk comes from goats," she returned in surprise. "We have goats. My grandfather caught the first one—a wild one—and gave it to my great-grandmother for a birthday gift. And on her birthday it had twin doe kids!"

She laughed, and he laughed with her, for no reason at all. Then he went on: "And I've seen no sign of a horse until I heard one nicker this mornin'."

She shook her head. "We have nothing here, sir, that we call a horse."

"Must call 'em somethin' else, then, for I heard one as sure as shootin'." He sobered suddenly and

frowned, as if trying to remember. "Am I some crazy, or did you get my guns out there on the desert and tie 'em around Jerushy's neck? I seem to think you did, and yet——"

"Yes, sir. They are here." She parted a tangle of brush close by, revealing a natural cache. "I could tell they were precious to you." She did not say that she had feared her grandsire might confiscate them. "So I hid them."

"Thank you, Drusie. Drusie. It's a sweet name," he mused, his mind beginning to function more clearly, as if he were coming out of a fog. "Old-fashioned. You never hear it any more. In fact," he went on, "the only name I ever heard that was anything like it was the name of a woman my grandfather knew. Drusilla!—her name was Drusilla and——"

"Girl!" It was old Barnaby Quinn, his face stern, his mouth set grimly. "I have come for you!"

THE yellow dog, Bett, walked with dignity up to Dave, nuzzled his hand daintily. Dave patted her shaggy head, but his gaze did not leave Drusie's face.

"Come, Drusie!" Barnaby commanded. "And you, Bett!"

The dog turned, came to the old man's side, stood there; but the girl flung her dark head with a defiant gesture, and her eyes flashed as angrily as his own. For a moment they stared at each other, then Drusie remembered Dave, who was watching the scene wonderingly. Dave must never know that he was not welcome in the Canyon of Sweet Waters.

"All right, grandsire," she agreed quietly. "It is time I went home."

Then she looked again at Dave. "Good night," she said softly. "I hope you rest well." And in spite

of her great-grandfather, she added firmly: "I will see you again, sir, soon!"

"Good night, Drusie!" Dave's voice was gentle, but grave. He passed one hand worriedly over his forehead. "Don't come if it means storin' up unhappiness for yourself. I don't rightly understand, but once I get on my feet I aim to understand." And, he finished grimly, "I'll make a point of seein' *you*!"

Drusie smiled, then started down the path, the dog Bett trotting ahead. She heard her grandfather's slow steps behind her, and, when she was out of Dave's hearing, she waited.

"Grandsire, I will see him again!" she said. "I came to-night because I did not want to hurt him, but after this I will go, and you will not object!"

Barnaby's breath came in a great, startled gasp. His hand lifted, and for an instant Drusie thought he might punish her; but his hand dropped again and he said, hoarsely:

"Come with me!"

She followed him along the creek around a bend. There, in a green cove that fitted tenderly into the shoulder of the canyon wall was the graveyard where the canyon dead slept under their mounds of rocks, piled up, starkly, to keep the coyotes from desecrating their resting places. Between the rock piles, flowers bloomed in profusion; sweet lavender, petunias, and fragrant mignonette.

Barnaby motioned Drusie over the stile set in the stone wall. Inside she waited, while he helped himself stiffly over; then the two stood together, quiet under their weight of thoughts.

Then Barnaby said: "Come with me to the grave of my son," and he led her to the spot where a hand-

hewn slab, set at the head of the rock mound, bore the carved name and inscription:

MATTHEW QUINN,

Aged 20 years.

Sympathy clouded Drusie's face; Matt had been grandsire's only son, she knew, and he had died so young; died, leaving a young wife, Cynthia, and twin sons.

Barnaby was upon his knees, carefully removing the rocks about the base of the slab.

"Look here!" he said harshly, and pointed to a line carved along the bottom. "Read!"

THE evening shadows were deepening, and Drusie had to bend close to read the crude carvings. She stared at the four words; stared until her eyes were misted by tears, until she trembled with sickening disbelief. For there, so deeply cut into the wood that it had withstood some forty years of weathering, was the further inscription:

KILLED BY A PURDY

Drusie couldn't speak. She huddled back upon the ground, beside the pile of stones, and stared into the quick-gathering darkness with wide, haunted eyes.

Above, on the rock rim, another pair of greedy eyes tried to pierce the shadows, tried to make out, with clearness, what the old man was disclosing as he piled away the rocks. Zeph Purdy couldn't see, but his heart beat high with triumph. What else would a man and a girl be digging up but the gold Zeph coveted?

"Pretty clever," Zeph told himself. "Hidin' it out in a graveyard. But they're not too clever for a

Purdy—even if they have got a half-dead Rutherford thrown in!"

He lay there for a moment, considering his plans. He was pretty sure he had the information he wanted now. Why not get the old man out of the way? He drew his six-gun, leveled it at that white head, then his fingers paused. A shot would bring the men of the settlement; that would mean he'd have to run for it without the gold. No, the best way was to go down and end the old man quietly. It would be easy. Old men's heads were brittle; they didn't hold up well against the butt end of a gun. That would leave the men down there without a leader, for Zeph had seen enough to know who made the laws. Afterward he could get what other information he needed from the girl; then all he had to do was get the gold, put a bullet into Dave Rutherford's heart and light out. He even had the trail marked for just such a quick leaving.

So Zeph Purdy holstered his gun and made his way back along the rock rim to the switchback trail that led into the canyon. Then, slowly, cautiously, he started down, death in his heart, while the two below—Drusie and Barnaby Quinn—went on with their talk, all unknowing that any deeper evil hung over them than the old despair Barnaby Quinn was reviving.

CHAPTER VIII.

SATAN'S GRAVEYARD.

DRUSIE felt paralyzed as she sat there on the ground beside her great-uncle's grave. *Killed by a Purdy!* The words were as deeply carved into her thoughts as they were on the wooden slab that marked Matt Quinn's grave.

"Drusie Bright!" Barnaby spoke

harshly as he seated himself upon a boulder. "By your rebellion and your defiance you have already brought trouble to this peaceful place. You are forcing me to open old graves, to bring evil from out of the past in order to keep you from bringing more harm to us. I am going to speak to you of things that have been sealed within my lips for many years.

She laid a hand upon his arm. Her dark eyes were filled with pity and contrition. "You have no need, grandsire!" she began, but he waved her aside, drew a deep breath and went on:

"My son, Matt, was but two, and our daughter an infant when my wife, Drusilla, and I, started out to make a new home in the West. Three other families were driving through with us: the Hogues, the Rutherfords, and the MacLeans. With me in my wagon was an orphan boy of fifteen, Gideon Bright."

"My grandfather!" Drusie murmured, her gaze going to the pile of rocks that marked his grave.

Barnaby nodded. "We were crossing the desert, headed toward Starvation Springs, when we were attacked," he said briefly.

He grew silent then, staring away into space, and Drusie waited patiently. She felt no eagerness to hear the tale now; nothing but dread. After a while he went on, tonelessly:

"The bandits killed, brutally—men, women, even small children. They plundered and burned the wagons. Through a miracle of God, my wagon load alone escaped; my family, along with Gideon Bright, two small boys—Jamesy MacLean and Luke Rutherford—and an infant, Cynthia Hogue, whom I took from her murdered mother's arms, were saved. And through the brav-

ery of young Luke Rutherford—he was but a lad of twelve—we captured the leader of the bandits. Black Purdy he called himself, from his ugly, black-bearded face."

Drusie shivered; the coolness of early night seemed to reach in and chill her bones.

"Black Purdy killed one of our horses!" The flatness had left Barnaby's tones; bitterness was creeping in. "The other horse was jaded—couldn't last long—but we hitched Purdy's saddle nag with it and managed to drag the wagon off the trail, out of sight. Then I put young Luke on Purdy's gray horse and started him toward Starvation Springs to fetch help. After he'd gone we discovered Purdy had escaped; he'd cut his bonds on a sharp stone. I was unused to the ways of evil men, but we knew he would bring back his band and kill us all as he had killed the others."

DRUSIE drew a long, shuddering breath, but still said nothing. Jerkily, now, as if every word were dragged across a wound, Barnaby resumed:

"To head into the desert meant almost certain death, but not as cruel a death as would come from Black Purdy. We hitched the single horse and drove away from the road. The wind was blowing, and the sand covered our trail quickly. Oh, it was a cruel trip!" He pounded one gaunt fist upon another at the memory. The dog at his feet growled deep in her throat. "We had so little water! And there were the children. But we kept on until, during the second night, the horse died."

"Yet you kept on," Drusie whispered. "You kept on."

"Drusilla would have it so," he told her. "She had the courage. It was always her belief that life lay in

layers: that below suffering lay peace—that sweet waters flowed under the hard rock—and the harder the rock, the sweeter the water. So we kept on. The next morning, after the horse died, Gideon walked around a ridge and beckoned me. I came—saw that the character of the land changed below. At the end of a long slope stretched a queer, rocky, wall-like structure, broken by a gap. So we lightened the wagon and pushed toward that gap. We came inside just at sunset, and our hearts withered at the sight before us. It was like a terrible graveyard, Satan's graveyard. We would have fled back into the desert—but one of our wagon wheels gave in to the dryness."

Despair surged in Barnaby's voice, as if the disaster were fresh. "It seemed that we must sit there until death came. Our water was almost gone, but I poured a few drops on the tongue of old Bett, the dog—ancestor to this one." His hand trembled as it rested upon the shaggy head of the dog beside him. "I begged her to crawl off and die, where we need not witness her misery. As if she understood, she crawled around a rocky butte and disappeared. And in the morning, when we were still huddled there, waiting for the end, old Bett came back. Not crawling—but walking! And we knew that somewhere, during the night, she had eaten and drunk her fill!"

The dog beside him now stood up, lifted her muzzle toward the switchback trail. Her warning was a low, rumbling growl, but Barnaby ordered her down. He could not know what the dog sensed, that an enemy was inching down upon them, gun in hand.

"And you went on, grandsire?" Drusie said gently.

"Aye, we went on. Afoot. Staggering, falling, managing to get up again, with the dying children lashed to our backs. Again and again I would have given up—but Drusilla would not. On and on, crazed, wanting to stop—to die—on we went, until we crawled to the rock rim above here and looked down upon this canyon. Then we knew that we had come at last to our sweet waters."

His voice broke and they sat in quietness. Drusie's hand curled itself up in his. Down at the settlement, a goat blatted. A child cried out sharply, and a woman's voice rose in lullaby. Gideon MacLean's cheery whistle sounded as he put up the shovel, because it was dark, and started down to meet Jenny. Beside Barnaby, the dog growled again and turned anxious eyes to her unheeding master. Then the animal dropped back, her nose toward the switchback trail, her body trembling at an alien odor. Mostly wolf was Bett in blood, but mostly dog in spirit. It had always been thus with the progeny of the first old Bett; every litter had at least one pup that seemed wholly dog.

Drusie had to speak, at last; had to know the answer to the awful questions that filled her. "And Black Purdy—followed?"

BARNABY shook his white head, while one hand rested upon a stone of the piled-up heap above his son. "He never found us—until now. Always I watched for him, but no one came. We were cut off from the world because we had no beast of burden. We had marked the trail, so we did go back to the wagon twice after we were rested and refreshed, and brought all we could of our belongings—the seeds we had brought to

start life in the new land. The copper kettle, the books, and foods. Then a wind storm raged for three days. When it ended, the trail was erased. So we stayed, building a world of our own."

"But Uncle Matt?"

"He tried to find the way out; Matt had married Cynthia Hogue, whom we had brought along. He wanted to widen the world for his young wife, so he wandered out, secretly, impulsively, marking the trail behind him. And it was well, for he had to crawl home again, a bullet hole in his back."

"But, grandsire——"

"Somewhere outside, the Purdys came upon him—Black Purdy and a son. They found he was a Quinn and took him prisoner, babbling to him about gold. When he would not tell them what he did not know they shot him and left him to die there in the desert. But Matt crawled back to let us know that Black Purdy still sought us. He came back, but to die. And from that day on, those of us who knew never spoke of the outside world. And none have questioned—until you, Drusie!" He sighed wearily. "And you brought a Purdy—here."

Drusie rose to her knees, stared through the darkness into his face. "But grandsire, Dave is not like that! He is——"

Barnaby jerked up his head. "He is a Purdy!" he said harshly. "He is of the stripe of those who drove us away from our own kind, who killed my only son! Through all these years I have kept the rifle I took from Black Purdy when I captured him. I have saved the bullets, and I have saved them for one purpose—for the heart of any Purdy who ever tracked us here! As soon as he is able to stand and face me he will die from those bullets!"

"But, grandsire!" It was a wild cry. "Grandsire, I love him!"

"You love him?" Barnaby echoed. "You——" His fingers closed about her arm in cruel intensity. "Girl, get you out of my sight! I shall arrange for your marriage to Barney Quinn—to-morrow! Until then, keep out of my sight!" And he stalked off, going stiffly over the stile, then down the trail until he was lost in the shadows. The dog, Bett, followed, as she had been taught, but she still growled.

Drusie stood up, stayed motionless until he was gone; then she threw herself down upon the flowers beside the first Drusilla's grave, and the night's stillness was broken by her wild sobbing.

FOR a long time after Barnaby and Drusie left, Dave sat there, frowning, trying to figure it out. His fever-befogged brain wasn't working right yet, he knew, but right enough for him to know that the old man considered him poison and was trying to keep the girl away. Dave knew, too, that he wasn't welcome on this queer cowless ranch, wherever it was.

He looked around, trying to figure his location. Drusie had brought him across the bad lands; he still had a dim memory of the jolting, of the clinking guns that had hung comically from Jerushy's neck. It had only been a few hours' journey, he recollected further, for the morning sun had still been shining when he had a brief spell of consciousness that first day, and found that his wound was freshly bandaged, and he was safe from Zeph Purdy for the time being. The Madonna-faced nurse, in her queer clothes, had talked not at all, though her ministrations had been gentle.

Strange fragments of thought

tried to fit themselves together in Dave's mind. The girl—the trip—then he heard Drusie's sobbing, and all else was forgotten. He straightened. Heedless of the pain in his thigh, he caught up the rude crutches that had been given him and dragged himself upright. Dizziness clutched him, but grimly he held to consciousness. Slowly, painfully, he helped himself across the shallow creek, then down the path toward the sound of the sobbing. He did not call to her; his voice might bring trouble, but he went grimly, sternly, angered at thought of the wrathful old man daring, perhaps, to punish the girl. The stile was difficult, but he made it, and, once across, he peered through the first moonlight till he glimpsed the huddled figure upon the ground.

"Drusie!" he said softly. "Drusie."

She sat up abruptly at his words. "Oh, you shouldn't have come!" she cried. "Your wound——" Then she remembered, turned her face away from him.

"Stand up, Drusie," he begged quietly. "Tell me what has happened."

"There is no need to tell you, sir, who know so well!" she cried out bitterly. "No more need than there is to mark for the hawk the nestlings he has killed."

"Drusie, what do you mean?"

She stood up, came to stand before him, and he saw that her face was white beneath the tear stains. He put out a hand, but she backed away, stood aloof from him.

"Oh, why did I have to find you?" she panted. "Why did I have to bring you here? Better that I should have perished in Satan's Graveyard than to bring evil to this world of ours!"

"Drusie, I don't understand!" He

spoke quietly, to soothe the hysteria that held her. "I don't——"

"If you don't understand, then look at this!" She ran to her great-uncle's grave, pointed to the slab that marked it. "Here lies my grandsire's only son—he was killed when he went out to find a new world for his bride. Read what is written here, sir, and know what your people before you have done to mine! Know why my great-grandfather has carried hatred all these years. Know why I've got to hate you—our enemy!" Her voice broke; she put one hand to her throat and stood there an instant; then whirled and ran across the flowers, over the stile and away.

"Drusie!" Dave called, but her footsteps beat a quicker pace. He could never catch her—hobbled with these crutches—but he could find out what troubled her. With shoulders drooping, he turned to the grave she had pointed out, drew a match from his pocket, lighted it, and held it while he read the inscription.

THE match burned his fingers as he still stared. Matthew Quinn! Matt Quinn—Barnaby Quinn's son! The teasing fragments of his thoughts fitted together all at once. His brain suddenly threw off its fever vapors and comprehension came.

No wonder he had not recognized the spot—it was a gully scooped out of the mazelike bad lands, a canyon unknown to any one outside. In some way the Quinn party had found it and here had built a new world. The old man was Barnaby Quinn, his father's friend. And yet Barnaby hated him.

Still bewildered, Dave lighted another match, saw the words at the bottom. *Killed by a Purdy.* Drusie's words came back: "He was

killed when he went out." Then the Purdys had had real reason for thinking the Rutherfords met the Quinns each year; they had met—and killed—young Matt. "What your people did to mine!" Drusie had said further. The Quinns thought he was a Purdy! No wonder he had not been welcome. Well, he could make that right.

Dave started across the graveyard, stopping only to look at a few more inscriptions. Drusilla Quinn, wife of Barnaby. Gideon Bright. Other Quinns, MacLeans, Brights—the story of their marriages, births, and deaths. Even the flowers here, the vegetables he had been given to eat, the coarsely ground meal—all these things made a complete picture now. The seeds, brought from the old home; the working out of means to use them here.

Dave hobbled along on his way to Barnaby Quinn. Over the stile, then—

He stopped as he heard Drusie's terror-stricken scream. There was the sound of a struggle, the crackling of brush.

Dave whirled on his crutches, hopped awkwardly toward the sounds, cursing the wound that hampered him. On and on, falling once, almost fainting from the pain, then dragging himself up to lunge forward once more. A dislodged stone rattled down from the cliff; and, as Dave stared upward, he saw a horse come up to the rock rim, silhouetted against the moon.

Silver-studded riding gear flashed in the moonlight; a familiar stocky form slouched in the saddle. Zeph Purdy! Before him, hanging limply across the horse, was Drusie's slight figure! Zeph paused there a second, looking down, and his laugh—harsh, triumphant—was echoed back and forth between the canyon walls.

Drusie screamed again. "Dave! Dave!" Then Zeph's horse jumped, under spurs, and disappeared.

Dave's breath was a rasping choke in his throat; the world spun redly around him. His thoughts were clear, terribly clear. Drusie was in danger, was in the hands of the Purdys.

Across the creek, Jerushy brayed derisively. "All right, old girl!" Dave told her. There was no time to call other help; the settlement below seemed asleep, oblivious to all sound.

A moment later, gun belts buckled, Dave was urging Jerushy up the trail that led to the rim. At the top, she stopped to bray her protest again, but he pushed her on ruthlessly. His wounded leg felt cool as the night breeze struck it; it must be bleeding again. Reason told him he couldn't last long; told him that he might be playing into Zeph's hands—that Zeph might be using the girl to get Dave into his power again. But Dave only rode on, one hand at the butt of a gun, knowing that every minute Zeph's quick-footed horse was widening the distance between himself and the plodding Jerushy.

Dave was well aware that his was a hopeless task—but he also knew that in some way he had to reach Drusie.

CHAPTER IX.

THE LOOM OF FATE.

BARNABY QUINN sat in a goathide chair, with a shawl around his shoulders. He had reached the cabin of Drusie and her sister before his rage abruptly deserted him, leaving him spent. He felt as old as time itself as he sat there, waiting for the sleepy Jenny to fetch young Barney Quinn. The

canyon people went to bed soon after sundown, and all was quiet about him.

Barnaby felt resentment, too—a weak, doddering resentment, he told himself irritably—against Jenny Bright. It was always Jenny who made him keenly conscious of his age. When he woke her to go for Barney, she had insisted that he sit down while he waited, had even helped him into the chair as if he had no muscles of his own. Once started, she had returned, a moment later, with the shawl.

"This night air," she had insisted. "You must not be careless."

Drusie never did this to him. She never rushed to help him do anything, even if he were a little slow in rising, or at easing himself into a chair. If Drusie saw him sitting here like this she would laugh. He jerked off the shawl, but folded it tenderly before he laid it over the chair arm. It had been his Drusilla's.

His head sank to his bosom as he thought of this other Drusilla—the fawn-wild Drusie Bright. Deep in his heart he loved her best; she was so much like his own Drusilla. He had favored her more, and now he was going to hurt her. She wouldn't want to marry Barney Quinn tomorrow, but Barnaby knew it was best for her. She'd have to forget this Purdy who had used his wiles to steal her heart!

Barnaby jerked up his head as, above the murmur of the stream, came the echo of a man's ugly laugh. Drusie's scream, "Dave! Dave!" brought him to his feet. There was the clatter of an animal clambering up the switchback that led out of the canyon. Barnaby's years fell from him as he ran down the path, around the pottery bend, from where

he could see the trail. Jerushy was just pulling herself to the rock rim.

"Drusie!" Barnaby shouted desperately. "Drusie!" But there was no doubt in his mind. The Purdys had taken her!

For the first time in years an oath ripped from Barnaby's lips. He raised his hands, shouting his curses into the air, then turned and stumbled back to his own cabin. Jenny ran to meet him, her face pale with fright. Barnaby Quinn came also.

"Grandsire, what is it?" Jenny cried. "We heard noises!"

"Don't wake the others!" Barnaby ordered. "And get out of my way!" He took down from the wall the old rifle and the belt of ancient bullets he had saved all these years—for the heart of a plundering Purdy.

"Grandsire, what is it?" young Barney asked. "Let me go—"

"You stay here!" Barnaby told him. "The fight is mine! I am going to finish what I should have ended years ago! I wanted to put a bullet into his heart when I had him captive, but Drusilla would not have it so. Now nobody shall stop me."

Not quite sane was Barnaby Quinn that minute. Fury flashed from his blue eyes, stained scarlet his parchmentlike cheeks. Young Barney opened his mouth to object, but never had he dared oppose this man who had been preacher, lawmaker and judge of the canyon people; and he couldn't speak up now in the face of the old man's mighty rage. Fearfully the two young folks crowded back and watched Barnaby Quinn stride forth.

JUST once Barnaby paused, near the glade, and called Drusie. When there was no answer he strode over the uptrail, caught the fresh tracks above. His old hand gripped the gunstock tighter, and

his shoulders flung themselves back as he followed into the breaks, back-trailing over ground he had thought never to travel again. On and on he went, through one long night hour after another, until the first streaks of dawn tinged the sky. And all the way he went with murder in his heart for the wounded Dave—who was already a prisoner in the hands of Zeph Purdy.

It had been pitifully easy, that capture. Dave had known that weakness was creeping over him as he hurried Jerushy along. He had fought it grimly, had tried to bandage the wound tighter, to stop the blood flow, but it was no use. By the time he came to the edge of the bad lands, at dawn, he was reeling on Jerushy's back, his hand fumbling futilely for his gun as he peered uncertainly through hazy, pain-weakened eyes. He only raised his head when Zeph Purdy's command came, like an echo of the week before.

"Lift 'em up, Dave Rutherford!"

Dave tried to resist, but he had no strength left, and Zeph pulled him to the ground. He did manage to get to his feet, swaying, at Drusie's sudden scream—she lay, a bound heap, upon the sand close by—but his dimming eyesight couldn't identify Zeph Purdy from the other shadows, and a blow from Zeph's fist sent him down again.

"I knowed you'd follow!" Zeph's chuckling tones seemed to come from a distance. "Soon as the gal run into me, I was smart enough to see how I could bring you folks out, one at a time, most likely. No horses down there—knowed you'd use the burro and get here first."

Dave lashed out blindly, but it did no good; Zeph was trussing him up. Dave felt himself dragged over

rough ground, then set down against a rock.

"There!" Zeph said. "Ain't takin' no chances of you gettin' away this time. I'll just leave you here till I hide out the girl somewheres, then I'll come back to finish that little talk we begun last week."

Zeph left then, and a moment later there was the sound of his horse leaving. Summoning all his strength, Dave strained against the bonds, but they were too tight. He fell back, exhausted, panting, the world whirling about him, hearing the sound of Drusie's sobbing go farther and farther away.

THE tapestry of fate is woven slowly but surely, with the pattern indistinguishable, blurred to the human eye. But when the right time comes, the warp and woof are drawn into a tight selva, ready for cutting and for turning over, to show a pattern beautifully blended and complete. Sometimes this tightening of all the threads is called, by unknowing mortals, coincidence; but it was no coincidence that was working around Satan's Graveyard that morning. Fate was gathering in the threads to finish the pattern begun so many years before.

One thread caught up Fi Purdy, filling him with the realization that his son, Zeph, had not returned from the desert. Knowing the disloyalty and greed in the heart of that son, Fi had mounted his gray gelding just before dawn to ride over the pass and make for the old landmark near the ridge. If Zeph had learned anything about the cached gold, Fi didn't mean to let him profit alone. He pushed the gray along at a run, never heeding that dust that clouded his blue flannel shirt, or settled thickly on his shabby black Stetson.

Another thread of the closing pattern drew Luke Rutherford back over the road he had traveled for aid so many years ago. Dave's riderless horse had been lying in the dust outside the gates when Niko, the half-breed, opened them this morning. The mare was worn to a skeleton; flies troubled a half-healed cut across her neck. Her sides heaved.

The breed had called Luke, helped him out to view Half Pint. "That cut," Niko chattered, "a bullet make that!"

"Yes!" Luke had grated out. "A Purdy bullet! What are you waiting for? Get my horse—my guns! Hurry!"

"You cannot ride with your leg like this!" Niko insisted. The boys—I get them from the range."

"No!" Luke said grimly. "Saddle the black stallion. He'll go like the wind. Then help me up."

It was sheer agony to jog along with that dangling, injured leg—too stiffly bandaged to get into a stirrup—but Luke rode swiftly, heading down into the desert, and then striking straight toward the bad lands to intercept a moving cloud of dust that was making in that direction from Purdy Pass.

Far out in Satan's Graveyard, a third man trudged through the alkali dust and the growing heat: Barnaby Quinn, his white beard flowing, his blue eyes aflame with wrath. Over his shoulder he carried the old Hall's rifle, loaded with the cartridges he had saved all these years for the heart of Black Purdy or his offspring. Even as he panted from the heat, Barnaby gave thanks that no morning breeze had yet risen to disturb the broken sands that marked the trail. A yellow dog named Bett trudged at his heels.

Three men traveled, drawn together for the finish of the pattern;

but of the three, only Fi Purdy was within miles of the spot where lay a wounded man under the blazing sun, suffering torture of mind and body—and where a helpless girl struggled in the vicious hands of the enemy.

CHAPTER X.

THE OLD RIFLE SPEAKS.

THE brassy sun rode the dome of the sky. For a time the rock to which Dave Rutherford was bound had cast a little shade, but that was past. Now it was like a stoked stove, reflecting the heat in stifling waves, and the sun was a burning agony upon his unprotected face and eyes. His bandages were sticky with congealed blood, drawing insects in an agonizing increase of number. Dave ached from his cramped position—drawing up his knees was the only movement possible, and the wound made this motion unbearable—but more than all his misery was his suffering over Drusic Bright, the dark-haired girl who had come into his life so recently and filled it as if she had been there always.

No merciful numbness came to ease his agony; each minute was an hour as he lay there, straining every nerve for some sound, some sign of what Zeph Purdy had done. But no sign came, no sound, save the weird sighing of the late-rising morning wind among the brakes.

Then a shot broke the stillness. Dead silence, then near-by voices—from somewhere near the gap, Dave judged. Lifting his own voice, he sent forth the remnant of his strength in a frantic shout.

There was no answering call. Only jangling voices, coming nearer, raised high in a quarrel.

"You and your shootin'—you

might of killed me!" one cried in a rage.

Dave's second call died in his throat. It was Fi Purdy, come to join his son!

"That shot went not more'n six inches from my nose," Fi went on. "I ought to empty both my guns into your middle!"

"How was I to know it was you snoopin'?" Zeph growled. "After I've done the work, you come along, grumblin'."

"If I hadn't come along, I'd have been left out," Fi retorted grimly as their approaching shadows jutted out upon the ground from the next boulder. "I'm here to get my share, and don't you forget it!"

Together they came to Dave, and Zeph prodded him with a foot.

"Ready to talk?" he asked. "Or do we have to clean out that loco canyon bunch to get our hands on the gold?"

"I'll talk when the girl is safe!" Dave rasped out through swollen lips.

"What girl?" Fi demanded, turning upon his son. "What girl is he talkin' about?"

"Just one he's sweet on," Zeph replied, red anger flickering in his eyes. "Nothin' to do with you—or him, any more."

"Where is she?" Fi asked.

"Back of that ridge over yonder, tied. She's a wild cat, but I'll look after her." He turned to Dave again. "If you don't talk now, you won't get another chance very soon."

DAVE read the implacable purpose in those reddish eyes. There was no use trying to bargain with Zeph Purdy, he told himself; only a bullet waited for him, and for the unarmed canyon folks. The only chance to help Drusie, and the others back there, was to start

a quarrel before the Purdys, father and son.

"You fool!" Dave cried out hoarsely. "Can't you realize that there is no gold? None except Barnaby Quinn's share, which is safe in the county bank—out of reach of you thievin' Purdys. Can't you understand what these yearly trips were—just an attempt to find some trace of Barnaby Quinn and his wagon? It's only your own greed that has built up the legend of all this gold you thought we had hidden!"

"I don't believe it!" Fi Purdy growled, hand to hip.

"Wait," Zeph said, and he stared at Dave as if to read his mind.

"It's the truth I'm tellin'." Dave choked the words through his dry throat. "There is no gold out here. And there'll be no more trips, for I've found Barnaby Quinn!" He looked at Fi. "It's his great-granddaughter that your son holds prisoner. Zeph thinks he can make her talk about things she knows nothing about—things he doesn't mean to share with you if he locates them."

Fi was visibly struggling between amazement and rage. His throat twisted, and his mouth dropped open, showing yellow-fanged teeth. Before he could voice either emotion, the clatter of hoof upon stone echoed eerily through the desert silence.

The two Purdys stood rigidly, hands to guns. As motionless as statues they waited, staring past Dave, past the rock to which he was bound, toward the strange gap in the black piled-up wall. Dave drew a long breath, let it out in a cry of warning; he knew that whoever was coming was no foe of his. The two Purdys were here.

His cry was choked, feeble. Before he could utter another, Zeph's

boot came up, knocking the breath momentarily from Dave's body. He lay there, gasping, as a long minute passed, with neither Purdy stirring.

Finally Fi palmed the gun, straightened up. His breath came out in a sigh of satisfaction; his motion of leveling was deliberate, pleasurable, as if he didn't want to miss a bit of the joy ahead.

"Now I'll get him!" he whispered. "I'll make him pay! I'm glad you only winged him last week, Zeph. Now I got my chance!"

Zeph's hand caught his father's gun arm. "Let him alone," he ordered. "He can't get away; that stallion is about done for! And maybe we can find out how much truth this hombre has told!" He stepped out, called: "Hands up, Rutherford! There's two of us, and we've got the drop!"

"Where's my grandson?" Luke demanded, his tones filled with weariness. "What have you done with Dave?"

"Wouldn't you like to know?" Zeph demanded. "I'd let you see for yourself, only it ain't pretty. Throw down them guns," he ordered further, "and do it quick!"

The answer was quick; so quick that it seemed to Dave as if Luke Rutherford could not have had time to drop his hands from the air and draw. But his six-gun barked. The sleeve of Zeph's right arm was slashed as neatly as if with a knife, and red stained the pasty-looking skin.

ZEPH'S gun spoke then—twice. Fi leaned around the other side of the tombstone spike and fired. There was the terrorized squeal of the stallion, the beat of his hoofs, wheeling away, but no sound came from his master.

Dave strained at his bonds

fiercely, hopelessly. If only he could see around the boulder, could see what had happened to Luke. If his grandfather were dead out there—

Luke's gun barked its own answer; a rain of lead pelted about the rocks and sand that sheltered the Purdys and Dave.

"The old devil!" Fi rasped. "He's rolled behind that break and holed himself in—game leg and all!"

"We'll get him!" Zeph growled. "He can't get away—all we got to do is wait."

Wait they did, through a long silence that stretched endlessly, it seemed to Dave. Was old Luke dead? Just when Dave decided that he was, a flurry of bullets came, whistling and whining, hitting the near-by rocks, bouncing off. That was Luke's clever plan, Dave realized, to get his quarry from ricocheting lead. He never dreamed that Dave was with the Purdys.

One shot struck close to its mark. Fi gave a queer grunt, reached for his hat. A token from Luke had cut the band of his Stetson and parted his black, bushy hair, drawing a little blood from the scalp.

Finally Zeph spoke. "Looks to me like I could slip back of this next break, then work around till I was behind him. You keep up the firin' here and I'll try it. It's too hot to keep up this fight much longer."

Fi nodded and fired as Zeph crawled away on the first leg of his sneaking journey. Dave fought his bonds again and cursed his weakness. He was conscious of little pain now; all the throbbing and the misery of heat and thirst had grown into one benumbing sensation of unreality. The brassy sky, the shimmering hot sands, the giant tombstone rocks—they all seemed like something from a bad dream. Even danger was vague; except when he

thought of Drusie. Then it became hideously, horribly real.

Dave could see Zeph as he made his journey, but his voice was nothing but a croaking in his dry throat now. There was no way he could lift it to reach his grandfather. The closer Zeph got, the more firing Fi did, until the earth was one terrible echo of gun thunder. Dave could still see Zeph when he rose to his knees and leveled his six-gun toward a spot out of Dave's vision. Triumph was in the grin on that swarthy, hawk-nosed face. Zeph's trigger finger made the slightest suggestion of a move, then stopped, as a girl's scream rent the air.

"Dave—Dave!"

Her sandaled small feet made a swift, light padding sound over the hot sands as she ran straight across the firing range, long dark braids flying, the torn grass dress clinging to her lithe, graceful figure.

"Drusie!" Dave cried out in his horror. "Drusie!"

"Drusie!" a louder voice boomed, like a great rolling echo.

She stopped. "Grandsire!" she gasped. "Grandsire!"

DAVE saw him then: Barnaby Quinn, tall, white-bearded, standing there, rifle in hand, blue eyes gleaming, his goatskin garments covered with dust. Even the Purdys held fire to stare at the strange apparition, with the yellow dog showing fangs at his side.

"Where is he?" Barnaby Quinn asked the girl. "This Purdy who brought you off?" Then louder: "Where is Dave?"

"Dave is no Purdy!" Drusie cried. "He is a Rutherford—your friend. This other Purdy told me! There is the Purdy——" And she pointed to Zeph. "There, grandsire! There!"

Zeph sprang into life. Barnaby

was out of his six-gun range, but Luke wasn't. Like greased lightning he drew again, leveled once more at Luke. Quick as he was, Barnaby Quinn was quicker. The old rifle was at his shoulder, as if he had been using it every day through these past many years. It exploded—there was no other word for it—and the evil smile of Zeph Purdy was blown from his ugly countenance. His six-gun dropped, unfired, and lay there, gleaming.

Fi's face showed no spasm of emotion as he saw his son spin about, then fall heavily to the ground. He edged farther along the boulder, raised his gun—at Drusie! He knew how he could hurt these enemies of his the most; if he had to die, he would carry their happiness with him. Dave read his thought as truly as if it were stamped across Fi's face in words clear and plain.

"Drusie!" Barnaby called as he loaded again. "Are there others? Are——"

Fi leaned out a little more, unnoticed by the man or girl. His Colts raised a bit, then settled into position.

Summoning all his breath, all his strength, Dave acted. His hoarse shout brought the rifle to Barnaby's shoulder again. Drawing up his legs as much as he could—feeling the bones of his shattered leg crunch at the movement—Dave kicked, landing his two bound ankles against Fi's back with startling suddenness.

Fi sprawled to his hands upon the sands, beyond the rock. Before he could recover, Barnaby's rifle crashed once more, and Fi didn't move to pick up the six-gun that had slithered from his hand at the fall. He lay there with his widespread feet braced between two small rocks that rose from the sand, with his hips reared into the air, and his face

buried in the sand, like a dog stretching his hind quarters. A great jagged hole was in his back, marking the exit of the bullet that had bored neatly into his stomach.

The ancient bullets Barnaby Quinn had saved for Black Purdy had found their marks in the hearts of the two remaining members of the Purdy clan. The pattern was finished; the warp and woof of it had been tightened into a finished selvage—a scarlet edge colored by spilled blood.

Already Drusie was cutting Dave's bonds. "As I struggled with the Purdy I took his knife and hid it," she explained. "It took so long to reach you, sir, after I had freed myself."

Dave only grinned at her as she pushed back the blond hair from his forehead, putting her slender body between him and the sun. Never had he seen any one so lovely.

THE stallion will go on after a rest," Luke Rutherford said when their thoughts were clear enough to plan. "Then there are the two Purdy mounts—and

Jerushy. The nearest place will be your canyon, Barnaby. We'll have to manage somehow."

"I marked the trail," Barnaby said, "and there's Bett. I'll be glad to go back. I thought, all these years, that I missed the outside, but now, with the walls moved away, I find that I want to draw my small world close around me again, like a cloak. For the young folks there can be journeying forth."

His eyes went to Drusie, holding Dave's head upon her lap, letting her gentle hands bring comfort to him. "But for me—I belong in my land of Sweet Waters."

"I'm glad this is finished," Luke sighed. "Glad."

The hands of the two old men clasped in wordless understanding. Both knew that something was ended; their old bones ached with the burden of carrying it through all these years.

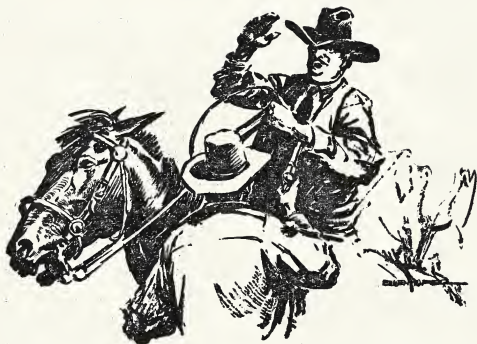
But Dave Rutherford only knew it to be an hour of beginning as he lay there, still smiling weakly into the pitying, tenderly sweet face of the dark-eyed girl who bent over him.

PLATINUM MINERS

THERE are platinum blondes, as every one knows, and there are also gold diggers, not always blondes. Then, there are platinum miners which have no relation to blondes or gold. There is also a town named Platinum, which is in Alaska. This town has one hundred square miles of adjacent mining claims. These mines took out 84,600 ounces of platinum in 1934, and in 1936 they took out 312,000. The yield for 1937 promises to be even larger. At present the price of this precious white metal is fifty dollars an ounce.

Perhaps the feminine gold diggers who do their sisters one better in their quest for filthy lucre will, in the future, prefer to be classed as platinum diggers.

The town of Platinum is as yet a small community living in tents and log shacks, very much the same as the early miners in the West. Boom towns will always rise, and doubtless ghost towns will always trail in their wake as desolate evidence of man's lust for sudden wealth.



SHORTY'S BILLET-DOUX

By RAY HUMPHREYS

Author of "Bumblebee's Bug," etc.

WHEN "Shorty" McKay, deputy sheriff, entered the sheriff's office at Monte Vista that morning, he was agreeably surprised to find his boss, Sheriff Joe Cook, in apparent good humor. The sheriff smiled a greeting for the first time in a whole half month of mornings. He even grunted a brief salutation, which cheered Shorty beyond measure. It was hard enough to work for the fiery old sheriff at any time, but it was always worse when

the sheriff was in one of his prolonged periods of depression, as he had been, now, for days and days.

"You must have got some good news about them dog-gone horse thieves we've been chasing so unsuccessfully," Shorty ventured, sinking into the nearest chair with a sigh. "I hope you have, boss, because I sure hate to come down every morning and find crape hanging off both ends of that drooping mustache of yours. You get a red-hot tip, maybe?"

Shorty was curious, but Sheriff Cook only smiled owlishly.

"Well, let's hear the glad tidings, boss!" insisted Shorty, hopefully. "Do we ride again to-day, with a posse, out Squaw Creek or Apache Mesa or over towards the Sangre de Cristos range country?"

Sheriff Cook puffed meditatively on his black cigar.

"Shorty, I can see you have noticed the difference in my demeanor," the sheriff said slowly, evidently choosing his words with deliberation. "I have been downcast, low-spirited, and the victim of much melancholy ever since we started looking for them blamed will-o'-the-wisp horse thieves! I got lower and lower, each day, as we searched in vain for 'em! We must have worn out half a dozen posses, in addition to the seats of our pants and my temper. But all that is changed now, son. I have taken, so to speak, a new lease on life! I have pulled myself up from the black abyss of despair, where only sorrow and defeat lurk."

"Gee whiz, boss!" exclaimed Shorty, in open-eyed admiration. "You can sure sling the language this morning! I haven't heard you talk like that in ages! You sure must have a red-hot tip."

Sheriff Cook puffed twice on his cigar before he answered.

"No," he said reflectively, "I have no red-hot tip on them thieves, and I have no ice-cold tip on 'em, either. But I have put a halter, so to say, on my spirits. I have yanked 'em up from the morass where they was bogged down in the clutching quicksands of utter chagrin! The truth of the matter is that I have been reading——"

Shorty's face brightened several more degrees. He fished into a pocket, feverishly, and brought out a

long envelope. Snatching a folded letter from it, he flipped it open.

"Speaking of reading, boss!" he exclaimed eagerly, "I been saving this to read to you for over two weeks, waiting until you were in good humor again. Now just listen to this—it's from a fellow up in Minnesota, name of Blaylock. I'll read it to you.

"MR. SHORTY MCKAY,
Sheriff's Office,
Monte Vista, Colo.
DEAR SIR:

How would you like to be photographed surrounded by the Dionne quintuplets? How would you like to be pictured as "The Mighty Nimrod," posed in front of a long line of slain moose, buck deer, four wolves and a Northern lynx? How would you like to be snapped aboard a fiercely bucking broncho, all four hoofs in the thin air? Or as "The Man on the Flying Trapeze," swinging dizzily high above a circus throng? Or as the winner of a six-day bicycle race? Or riding a surf board at Waikiki? Or in full flight on a pair of skis in the Bavarian Alps? Or addressing a vast crowd in the big plaza at Rome?

Imagine, if you can, how one of these photographs would surprise and delight your friends! And it is all so simple. You do not have to go to the Northern woods, where the moose abound, or to the Dionne home, the rodeo, the circus, Waikiki, or the Alps. Just send us one dollar and a good full-faced photo of yourself and by a combining process known only to us we will make a composite picture that will completely defy detection, amaze every one who sees it, and make you far more important in your home town. Send the dollar to-day!"

WHEN the flushed Shorty looked up, after reading the letter, he found that Sheriff Cook was no longer smiling. The sunshine was gone out of the sheriff's face, the light out of his eyes.

"Well, what of all that?" asked Cook, in a chilly tone.

"Now don't get peeved, boss!" pleaded Shorty, sorry now that he had been so hasty in reading the let-

ter. "I was just meaning to make you a present, that's all! I was figuring on getting a large one of you on that bucking broncho, for your birthday present, and hanging it up here in the office, to interest and impress callers. I meant to get a nice frame——"

Sheriff Cook brought a clenched fist down on his desk with a thud that made the inkwell and several books and paper dance, an immediate jig.

"I ought to frame both your eyes with black borders!" he bellowed, his mustache bristling belligerently. "Here while I've been working my fool head off chasing them horse thieves, tossing through sleepless nights and worrying myself into an early grave, you been flirting around with a letter like that! Wouldn't I look nice riding a bucking broncho? All any one would say, who knew me, on seeing such a picture, would be that I must have got hold of a jug of Mexican *tequila*! It beats me how you fall for every racket that comes along! Once a sucker, always a sucker, I reckon! You burn that confounded letter now!"

Shorty shrugged his shoulders in resignation, and the sheriff noticed that there was perspiration on Shorty's forehead.

"I'm sorry," apologized the deputy, apparently as deep in the morass of despair, now, as his superior had ever been. "Let's drop the subject, boss!" He struck a match and held it to the lower corner of the letter, letting the flames curl up and devour Mr. Blaylock's wonderful offer. "But what about the horse thieves, boss? Are we going out to-day with another posse, maybe, to take another whirl at 'em?"

The sheriff's long face shortened a trifle. Again his eyes glowed.

"Shorty, as I started to tell you

when you interrupted me," he said, "I did some reading myself last night—not one of them fool sucker letters, like you have there, but a darned good book on psychology that gives a fellow a pretty good line on human behavior and such. I see where I have been making a real social blunder, and I'm off on a new foot. Yes, sir, Shorty, I'm off on a new foot!"

Shorty didn't know what to say, it seemed, so he said nothing.

"I am also off after them rustlers, at once and alone," went on the sheriff, grimly. "I think we've been making a mistake there, too, having a whole pack of guys riding with us, kicking up big clouds of dust, giving any crook an eyeful of us on the horizon. I ain't sure, but I'm betting that most of them posse men had the wrong mental attitude, too. They probably figured we were doomed to disappointment. I'll admit I felt that way. Well, naturally, that prevalent opinion didn't help matters none, I found out from the book. So I'm eliminating such obstacles. I mean I am going out, to-day, as a lone wolf, a confident lone wolf, a self-sufficient shadow and——"

"You mean you and me are going," Shorty put in.

"I do not mean any such thing," corrected Sheriff Cook. "I am going alone. I may be back this evening. Or it may be to-morrow evening. Or, perhaps, not until Sunday. But when I do come back, Shorty—and mark this psychology, son—I'll drag them two horse thieves behind me, candidates for the hoosegow! I'll show you the power of the mind, boy! Where you have the will to succeed you *will* succeed!"

"I don't know," sighed Shorty, apparently not greatly impressed, and visibly disappointed because he

wasn't going. "Them two buzzards are supposed to be mighty tough hombres, boss. What if *they* both have the will to succeed, too? Two minds battling against one might be——"

"What kind of a mind has a horse thief got?" exploded the sheriff, as he got up and reached for his cartridge belt and his twin holsters. "If I can't outthink, outsmart, and out-power half a dozen horse-thief minds with my mind, I'm a mighty poor sheriff!" He buckled on the belt with a bit of a swagger. "Well, son, I'm off. As for you, you just stay here and sort of keep house while I'm gone. I'll be back as soon as possible."

Shorty stuck out a hand, but he had a woebegone look on his face.

"Well, good luck, boss!" he said, tears in his tone. "I am sorry to be left behind, but you're the boss. However, I think I should know what general direction you aim on going."

The sheriff carefully lowered his voice. "I'm going up Phantom Canyon—that's where!"

Shorty's eyes widened.

"Say," he exclaimed, "that isn't a bad idea!"

"I'll say it isn't!" The sheriff smiled indulgently. "And I'm going out there strutting like a Golden Sebright bantam cock! Confidence is my middle name, boy! Trusting in my own prowess, I can't fail!"

THE sheriff patted his holsters affectionately. Then, whistling a little tune, he stepped out of the office, went to the corral, and untied his big black horse. He mounted and rode down Pecos Street, bowing sedately to several passing citizens. Two blocks down, at the edge of the business section, he felt, speculatively, in his vest

pocket. There was only one cigar there.

"I better stock up on smokes," he decided, swinging his horse in toward the curb. He dismounted and sauntered into the Healy & Owens drug emporium. On the way out he happened to think of the morning mail, so he crossed the street to the post office. He came out with a handful of mail, mounted his horse, and turned up Mariposa Street, glancing at the mail as he rode. There were three letters for Shorty, he noticed, each addressed in a feminine hand. He stuck these in his pocket with a snort.

"Mush notes," he said disgustedly. "Well, these can wait until I get back. No loss, either, if I lose 'em, I reckon!"

He looked over the rest of his mail. There was a circular from the Denver police department, which he stuck in his pocket, unopened. There was a letter from the Albuquerque sheriff's office. He stuck that away, too. There were two bulky pieces of mail. He noticed that one was marked, "Photo—Do Not Fold." He stowed them away.

"More pictures of more crooks wanted," he groaned. "I got a hundred of 'em in the office. For every blamed outlaw you catch, it seems, five more spring up."

He looked at the final piece of mail. It was a post card. He read it. A lady in Belmont, Massachusetts, wanted him to look for her husband, who had run away. But she didn't give any description or mention her husband's first name or initials. The sheriff grumbled—but he filed it away in his pocket.

"Now!" he exclaimed, straightening up in the saddle and urging the black horse out of a walk into a smart trot. "Now for Phantom Canyon—and success!"

Phantom Canyon, however, was farther away than a mere exclamation. It was a good twenty-two miles out, and rather rugged going. The canyon, deep, dark, and often mysterious, led straight up to the high peak section of the Continental Divide. As it ascended it branched off into numerous little box canyons, heavily timbered. At times cattlemen used the trail to bring stock down from the high summer pastures, but ordinarily the place was in undisputed possession of bear, deer, elk, and a few bands of mountain sheep. It naturally afforded good cover for any number of hide-outs.

"Funny how I overlooked this place to start with," grumbled the sheriff, as he rode. "But then, my mind was in a turmoil, I guess. I had an inferiority complex and wasn't thinking straight."

He rode on, alert, hoping that he would soon catch some sight of his quarry. He did not actually explore all of the side canyons, but he looked for signs in the trail, watched for smoke in the timber, and assured himself, as he passed one after the other of the offshoots, that there was no indication of human life. He had hardly expected to find the men in the lower reaches of the canyon. He reasoned that they would be fairly well up, probably where they would have a good view of the lower trail, and most likely adjacent to some of the little alpine meadows that were lush with wild hay and ideal pasture for a few saddle horses and some stolen stock.

"Seems kind of funny to be riding up here alone!" The sheriff spoke aloud to keep himself company. "But it is peaceful, at that. And all the great sleuths of history, I reckon, worked quietly and alone. They never had a pack of assistants bark-

ing at their heels! They had just their own two eyes, their own two ears, a brain, and a supreme trust in themselves. Boy, I certainly was off on the wrong foot before!"

He rode on, slowly. There was no need for haste. It behooved him, he knew, to overlook nothing on the way up. He wanted to be quite certain that his prey was still ahead of him. Eventually, if his new psychology was sound, he would come to the bandit lair. After that, everything depended on a cautious approach, no doubt, a surprise appearance, a quick covering of the culprits, then speedy but efficient disarming of the pair. Then would come the handcuffs and the triumphant return to Monte Vista and public acclaim.

"I'll certainly be proud!" declared Cook, visioning that triumphant home-coming.

BUT, even though his mind was on his ultimate victory, he realized that he had yet to find the prisoners-to-be. He let the black horse go up the trail at a snail's pace. He looked this way and that; observed birds, to get their reaction; studied each faint game trail that swung off into the brush; and kept his ears cocked for any unusual sounds. He had carefully adjusted his holsters so that he could make a lightninglike draw if necessary. He felt, rather than knew, that the two elusive horse thieves would be pretty tough customers. The few isolated ranchers who had reported seeing the pair had described them as mean-looking hombres, well-armed and well-mounted. It would not do to take any chances, even though he was quite confident of being able to capture them single-handed.

"I don't want to shoot it out with

'em, but I will if necessary," Cook decided, after a period of deep thinking. "I figure, though, that I'm going to surprise those birds good and plenty!"

The sheriff chuckled in anticipatory glee and reached for a fresh cigar.

"It'll be a joke, at that, for me to catch these two guys single-handed after a posse rode twelve days after 'em without results."

The sheriff struck a match to his cigar, and his black horse sidestepped. At the same moment a man stepped into the road from behind a clump of red dogwood.

"Don't move a finger!" said the man, leveling a huge revolver straight at the sheriff's nose. "What you doing up here?"

The sheriff knew, with one swift glance, that he had found one of his quarry, at least. The man in the road was swarthy, dirty, and tough!

"Just riding along," said the sheriff, in a chilled voice.

"What for?" persisted the man with the gun. "You're toting a lot of expensive artillery, too, ain't you? You a stock-association detective?"

"I should say not!" retorted the perspiring Cook with so much vehemence that the stranger was convinced. "What's the idea of you stopping me here, brother? I'd like to ride along!"

"You'll be riding to Hades if you ain't careful!" snarled the gunman, suspiciously. "You stay frozen stiff there! Hey, Facundo!"

There was a movement down a gully, and shortly another man appeared through the dogwood. He was a fierce-looking customer—dark, bushy-faced, with a deep scar across his forehead. He scowled at the sheriff.

"Ha, Claudio, what have we here?" he asked, grimly. Then his

eyes gleamed. "Claudio, you have made a real catch, my dear one! You know who that is, maybe?"

"No," said Claudio, blinking up at Cook, eagerly. "What is it, Facundo?"

"It is none other than his royal nibs, the sheriff from Monte Vista," answered Facundo, with a deep laugh. "It is him! Ha, sheriff, welcome to Phantom Canyon! Claudio and Facundo are glad to welcome you!"

SHERIFF COOK sat petrified. There was nothing else for him to do, seeing that Claudio still had that villainous gun pointed straight at him. Facundo reached over and jerked away the sheriff's weapons, chuckling all the while.

"Well," grunted the sheriff, "now what?"

"It is a very fine joke, and Facundo laugh away down in his insides," came the answer. "Look! See! Claudio laughs now, too! How come you ride up here alone, Señor Sheriff? We know you are alone because we saw you on that loop, far below. But of late you have ridden hard with an army to try to catch Claudio and Facundo! You do not catch. But now, we catch! Oh, excuse me for much amusement, señor. I think I die laughing!"

Claudio smiled evilly, but he kept his eyes on his prisoner.

"We take him into the bush, Facundo, and——" asked Claudio.

"No," said Facundo, with a merry oath. "You are far too serious, Claudio! Do you not remember that high cliff where we ran that spotted stallion over the other day, because he was too conspicuous to sell? He went over and over, turning many fantastic somersaults, and disappeared finally in the high timber away down? It is there we go now,

as soon as I fetch our horses, and we shall see Señor Sheriff ride over, after the painted stallion. He will turn many fine somersaults——"

Facundo doubled up in a spasm of mirth.

"We shall see how long Señor Sheriff remain in the saddle as he rides through the air to keep his appointment with the devil!" The tears ran down Facundo's cheeks. "It will be much enjoyment! I shall never forget, Claudio, and neither shall you. And each time we think of it we shall laugh again until the tears come! Ho-ho, what a joke!"

But Claudio scowled. He spoke out of the corner of his mouth.

"Why destroy this big black horse? Claudio desires him, Facundo!"

"No, no, Claudio!" protested Facundo, laughing still. "It would be bad! It would be clew, maybe. No, Señor Sheriff rides to his date in Hades. It is fitting. It is just. And it is so amusing. Maybe I give you one of his guns, Claudio, for souvenir—but not the horse—no, no!"

Suddenly Facundo had another idea. He laughed hilariously.

"Maybe I give you his bright badge, Claudio, for keepsake, if he has it on him!" Facundo turned blazing eyes on Cook. "Get down off that horse, coyote, so that a real man who knows no master can search you!"

The sheriff obeyed. He had no choice. Facundo went over him swiftly, pulling everything from his pockets. They found the badge. They divided his cigars greedily. Then Facundo pawed over the mail. He tossed most of it into the dogwood. But the two bulkier envelopes interested him. He tore one open and found a picture of a man in convict's garb on a "wanted" circular. Facundo laughed again, heartily.

"Fly away, friend!" he cried joyously, and tossed the circular into the brush. "The Señor Sheriff no look for you. He rushes to meet Señor Satan. It is a break for you, friend!"

Then Facundo tore into the other package. He extracted a picture from it. But as he stared at it the sheriff noticed a look of amazement, then of awe, come over the cruel face. For a moment Facundo appeared stunned. Then his gold teeth flashed again in an expansive smile.

"Ha!" he cried, shoving the picture under Claudio's nose. "Look! Our friend is a good rider! See, he ride the piece of wood at tremendous speed over the foaming waters! He smile as he do so, Claudio! Ha, it will be easy to him to ride his horse through the air beyond the cliff! Maybe he do stay in the saddle all the way down, eh?"

Sheriff Cook frowned.

"What you talking about, anyway?" he growled, trying to summon up some psychology. "What is that picture?"

"It is you, Señor Sheriff, riding a stick over angry waters!" laughed Facundo. "It is good picture! Maybe you have not seen? Maybe you just get, eh? Well, take a look at it. If it pleases you, look!"

The sheriff got a hasty glimpse of the photograph. It showed a husky man in a bathing suit. The man was atop a tilted plank, apparently equipped with reins, gliding over the waves.

"Who is that guy?" asked the sheriff, hoarsely, thinking that the longer he could prolong the conversation the better. "I don't know him!"

"Ha, you joke even as you die, Señor Sheriff!" laughed Facundo. "It is you! But it is a good trick! Fa-

cundo never saw it done! It says below, 'Riding the Surf at Waikiki.' Where is that place, Señor Sheriff? Maybe Satan will let you ride a broomstick in the hot place!"

THE sheriff's face turned scarlet, then purple. Dimly, now, he recalled Shorty having mentioned some such place as Waikiki while reading the sucker letter. Evidently Shorty had gone ahead, before mentioning the matter, and had paid out a dollar and——

"You can tear up that picture, Mr. Horse Thief!" cried Cook.

"Ha, no!" answered Facundo. "We keep as a souvenir, Señor Sheriff!"

"Let's go to the cliff of the painted stallion, Facundo!" spoke up Claudio. "We lose time here. Let us go!"

"I get the horses, Claudio. Then we all ride up the trail!" cried Facundo, going back into the brush. He reappeared, in a moment, with two horses. "I ride ahead, Claudio. You follow me, Señor Sheriff. You, dear Claudio, ride behind our friend so that he do not depart from us!"

Facundo swung into the saddle, chuckling. He yanked the picture out of his pocket. "This is funny, Señor Sheriff! Our friends will laugh in the years to come! It is too bad Facundo and Claudio cannot ride sticks in water, too!"

They started, but all the way Facundo chuckled. He swayed in the saddle, at times, with explosive mirth. Sheriff Cook, an icy hand clutching his heart, did not laugh. He didn't even smile. He knew that he was in the hands of a pair of heartless villains, and that he had just about reached the end of his rope. Psychology was of no avail now, he thought. And if he went over the high cliff they'd probably

never find his bones. His disappearance would go down in history as an unsolved mystery; Claudio and Facundo would escape the vengeance of the law.

"I was a fool," he thought bitterly, "for coming up here alone!"

But it was too late, now, to rectify that. Facundo rode on, still mirthful, while Claudio rode behind, his gun ever ready, ever menacing.

But, suddenly, Facundo turned aside, to the left.

"It is wrong way! You make mistake!" called Claudio, hoarsely.

"No," grinned Facundo, whirling in his saddle. "We go first to the little lake yonder. It is a good joke. We shall have some fun!"

"What fun?" asked Claudio, dubiously. "I say we go to the cliff!"

"We go there soon, my dear one!" soothed Facundo, gleefully. "But now we stop for a short time at the lake. Facundo has a big idea, my Claudio! We will all laugh! It shall be very funny!"

The sheriff, deep in his miserable thoughts, paid slight heed to Facundo's remarks. But he was glad that the trip to the cliff was to be delayed, even temporarily. It would give him more time to think. And he must think! Nothing could save him now except some brilliant idea—that was the only hope in sight! There was no chance that any one would come along, in that wilderness, and, even if some one did come, Facundo and Claudio would only have another poor victim to send over the cliff!

"Stop!" cried Facundo, suddenly, pulling up his horse. The sheriff's horse stopped. Facundo piled off in a great hurry. The sheriff, lifting his worried eyes, saw a small lake, with timbered shores. Facundo was laughing uproariously again.

"The Señor Sheriff will show us

how to ride the stick over the water, Claudio!" cried Facundo, wiping away the tears. "He shall have one last ride on the stick before he ride off the cliff!"

Sheriff Cook came to with a start.

"Say, I can't ride no stick on water——"

"You lie. Facundo has the picture. You ride a nice sapling here, standing up, like in the picture, Señor Sheriff!"

The sheriff's face went purple. They were adding insult to injury!

"I tell you, Mr. Horse Thief, that I can't do it!" he cried angrily.

THEN, as he saw that Facundo was in deadly earnest, his face blanched. The outlaw intended that he should ride a stick! The sheriff's heart missed a beat. Confound that picture! Confound Shorty!

"Señor Sheriff ride the stick—sure!" cried Facundo, dragging Cook off his horse. "Facundo do not lie. Picture do not lie. Maybe some day Facundo desire to ride stick. He see now how to do it!"

"I'll just drown!" cried Cook, aghast.

"O. K." Facundo nodded indifferently. "Then drown. But we shall see! Claudio, undo your lariat. Then go fetch a sapling, not too big, not too small. We put a bridle on it. We see some real fun!"

The sheriff leaned against his horse. Well, after all, he thought, stoically, why not drown? It might be an easier death than riding off a high cliff! Maybe some one would find his body, if he drowned. He tried to gain some happiness out of that dismal thought. Claudio came back lugging a white-birch sapling.

"Ha!" exclaimed the merry Facundo. "Claudio, you do well, indeed! See, take a look at this pic-

ture! Fix up the sapling with a pair of nice reins, like here! Also, get your hatchet and chop off the limbs."

"Si," nodded Claudio, smiling, too. "I will be delight to see——"

Bang! Facundo's high-peaked hat went sailing away, suddenly, toward the placid waters of the lake. Facundo crouched, clawed at his holster. Claudio grabbed for the gun he had put down on a rotting log.

"Don't move, boys—or we shoot to kill!"

Sheriff Cook thrilled at the voice. Shorty! He kept his hands up, as he had had them ever since reaching the lake, but he turned a pathetic face in the direction of the voice. Again he heard Shorty shout—and the words warmed the sheriff's shuddering soul.

"Stay back, men, and keep 'em covered while I put the bracelets on 'em!" Shorty was yelling. "If they move, shoot to kill!"

Shorty came running up, on foot. He gave Claudio a swift kick and sent him sprawling toward Facundo. The latter made as if to go for his gun again, but Shorty brought the butt of a revolver down on his head with a sharp whack. Facundo sank to his knees, to his elbows, trembled, and sprawled flat on the ground.

Quickly, then, Shorty clicked a handcuff on the left wrist of Claudio. Then he stooped and fastened Claudio to the fallen Facundo. Then he stood up and grinned at the white-faced Cook.

"Well, boss," he remarked softly, "I got here in time!"

"These men are desperate characters!" cried Sheriff Cook in a voice that he did not recognize as his own, it was so flabby, so weak. "You'd better get the rest of the posse in here quick. When Facundo there regains consciousness he will be a veritable wild cat——"

"I have no posse," said Shorty, sadly. "I came alone. I was just yelling for the effect."

"Great guns!" exclaimed Sheriff Cook, stooping to recover his weapons from the fallen Facundo. "You came just in time. I was about to go riding in the lake on a sapling, thanks to you! After that, I was going over a cliff."

"Don't blame me!" protested Shorty. "You see, I got a special-delivery letter this morning, just a minute after you left. It said not to bother about the instructions in a letter in the same mail. I rushed to the post office to get the mail and found you had taken it with you. So, you see, I had to rush after you to get the original letter!"

The sheriff looked dejected again.

"These crooks threw all my mail away, Shorty," he said. "I'm sorry."

"But I found it!" said Shorty. "It was one of the letters, blowing out of a dogwood thicket as I came up the trail, that caught my eye. I stopped to investigate and found 'em all. Then I knew you were in trouble. I hurried on, watching the signs in the trail, and I saw where you had turned off for the lake. So I came on from there carefully, and you know the rest!"

"Yes," nodded the sheriff, feeling twenty years younger all of a sudden, "but this special-delivery letter you got, Shorty? What did——"

"It was from Annabelle," said Shorty, blushing. "A girl I know in Telluride. It said simply to disregard instructions in other letter and to go ahead with regular plan. So I had to get the other letter. I got it, back yonder in the dogwood. It said not to send her a box of fudge, as I had promised, but to send caramels instead."

"You nitwit!" cried the sheriff, flaring up. "And you getting my face stuck in that surf-riding picture! I ought to—er—that is——"

The sheriff stopped suddenly. He went pale.

"Pardon me, Shorty!" he gasped. "I guess it was that surf-riding photograph that saved me, after all! If it hadn't been for that we wouldn't have stopped here at the lake, and I would have been over the cliff before you could have overtaken us! Say, reach in Facundo's pocket and get me that picture—I want it for a souvenir. Then, when you send that Annabelle girl her box of candy, whether it's fudge or caramels, just send her an extra box from me. And I've got a nice book you can send her, too—it's on psychology!"

A New Serial,

"GUNFIRE GOLD IN SILVER TOWN," by ELI COLTER,

Begins in Next Week's Issue.

BANTAM TURNS TO QUAIL

JUST as some people voluntarily take over another's responsibility, so did a bantam hen belonging to a Phoenix, Arizona, farmer, decide to hatch and raise a brood of quail. What happened to mother quail is not known, but a week after the bantam had disappeared from its home, she reappeared with eleven quail chicks strutting proudly behind her.



NOT THE KNOT

By GUTHRIE BROWN

Author of "Clean-up," etc.

THE last person that "Lefty" Pearl expected to see in La Junta that November night was the county sheriff, Sanborn. The tall, big-boned, bleak-faced officer walked into the hotel where the freight contractor was eating supper. The hard eyes of Sanborn lighted a little at sight of the sinewy figure in faded overalls and stained shirt.

"Hello there!" Lefty greeted him. "What brings you over in this end of the county?"

The sheriff drew a chair up to the table beside the other and didn't answer until he had given his order for supper. Then he asked:

"Lefty, have you got a driver working for you by the name of Burke Evans?"

The gray eyes of Lefty Pearl studied the other a moment before he said, "Yeh. Why?"

"How long's he been with you?"

"'Bout six weeks, I guess."

"Got a big brindle dog, mastiff, with him?" Sanborn asked.

"Yeh."

"Did you know he was an escaped convict?" was the sheriff's next question.

Lefty said slowly, "I had an idea there was somethin' wrong. But I liked the fellow. He's a darn good driver."

Sanborn nodded. "He used to

drive stage up in Montana. Before that he was a sailor." The sheriff looked at the freighter. "That tell you anything?"

Lefty thought a minute, then shook his head. "Can't say it does."

Sanborn asked, "Remember that murder case up North, five, six years ago? The man was choked to death with a rope that was tied with a sailor knot."

"The Cravell case, you mean?"

"That's the one. Evans was convicted on circumstantial evidence, but the evidence was overwhelming just the same. He'd quarreled with Cravell, he had no alibi, and that bowline knot cinched the case. I was at the trial. Had a prisoner who was subpoenaed as a witness, and I had to take him up there."

Lefty was thoughtful. "Course, my acquaintance with murderers ain't very wide, but somehow I wouldn't 've picked out Burke Evans for one."

Sanborn nodded, with a grim little smile. "I've learned that a man's looks is nothing to go by. We traced Evans down by that dog. It seems that he'd had the brute before this thing happened. When he was arrested, he gave the mastiff to a friend to take care of. The friend had to feed him through a wire fence, because he's absolutely savage when he's separated from his master."

Lefty nodded. "That ties in. Nobody dares go near the dog unless Burke stands by. I can usually get along with any animal, but there's one I've never been able to make up with. Seems strange that Burke would take the dog with him after his escape from prison. Nothing would identify him quicker."

The sheriff agreed. "I suppose the brute is the one thing in the world he cares for, or that cares for him,

maybe. He got away about three years ago, and there's never been a trace of him till just lately. He came so far south, and into such a remote region to work, that he probably figured he was safe." There was a pause before the sheriff asked, "Where is he now?"

"He'll pull into Pelley Bend sometime to-night," Lefty answered.

"Um-m," murmured Sanborn, "forty miles. I can make it down the river before midnight with team and rig, can't I?"

Lefty hesitated a moment before he answered. "The fact is, I've got to go down myself to-night. Just got word that one of my drivers is laid up, and I've got to take his load on out to the mine from Pelley Bend."

"Good," said Sanborn. "You can go down with me."

Lefty gave him a wry smile. "Not so good. I don't like this business. And I'm hanged if I can figure that man as a killer."

Sanborn made no answer. He finished his supper, paid his bill and the two walked out.

THE one rutted street of the little canyon town of Pelley Bend, which was the halfway stop for Lefty Pearl's freight teams between the railroad and the Buckram Mine, was lost in the darkness of the cloudy night when the two men stopped before the livery barn. They roused the night boy to take care of their team, and Lefty assured himself that the six horses which Burke Evans had been driving were in their stalls. He asked the sheriff:

"Do you wanta take him to-night or wait till morning?"

"Better do it now," decided the sheriff. "I'll think I'm lucky if I catch him asleep. He made one of the cleverest jail breaks I ever heard

of. He's a resourceful bird, and I'll need any advantage I can get."

"I hope," said Lefty, "that we'll get by without any fuss. If we raise a row we'll have Aunt Dode on top of us."

"I have," remarked the sheriff, "had worse things than that happen to me."

"I doubt it," was Lefty's response. "Aunt Dode on a rampage can give any man pause."

But the threat of the redoubtable boarding-house keeper did not impress Sanborn. Lefty roused her from sleep by a discreet knock on her door. She recognized his voice and opened a crack to ask into the gloom of the hallway:

"What's up, Lefty?"

He inquired, "What room's Burke Evans in, Dode?"

She told him and demanded, "Who's with you?"

Lefty answered, "Sanborn."

The crack of the door widened, and they could see the dim outline of her night-capped head.

"What's he doin' here?"

"He's come to arrest Burke."

"Yeh?" returned Aunt Dode.

"Well, if he makes any noise about it, he's gonna wish he hadn't." With that warning she closed the door.

The two men tiptoed down the hall to Burke's door. They listened and could hear the deep, even breathing of the man inside the small room. Sanborn tried the knob. The door wasn't locked. He pushed it open noiselessly and stepped inside.

Right there things broke loose. There was the sound of a deep-throated growl, then a dark body launched itself at the officer's throat, hurling him backward into the hall. Lefty caught at Sanborn, in an effort to keep him from falling, and beat back the powerful mastiff with one arm. The dog tore the coat

from the freighter's shoulder, then sank his teeth into the leg of the sheriff as Lefty flung the animal back.

The uproar brought sounds of creaking springs and feet thumping the floor from the other rooms along the hall. The door of Aunt Dode's room flew open and she appeared in the hall, lamp in hand, kimono clutched about her, gray hair in a braid, and black eyes snapping with anger.

"I told you——" she began furiously.

But her voice was drowned in the racket. Sanborn was on his back trying to fight off the dog. Lefty had the animal by one hind leg, hauling with all his might, but having about as little effect as if he'd had hold of a rhinoceros. The dog was fighting to get at Sanborn's throat, and it began to appear that he might succeed, in spite of the efforts of both men.

Doors banged open as half-clad men lunged out into the hall. Then came the crash of breaking glass, and Lefty knew that Burke Evans had gone through the window. In a moment the voice of the man called clearly:

"Brin!"

Instantly the great dog whirled and dashed back into the room. Again the sound of smashed glass told the listeners that he had catapulted himself through the window after his master.

The sheriff, for so big a man, could move fast. He was instantly on his feet. He followed the dog, or tried to. But the window would not accommodate his shoulders. He was forced to come back and dash down the hall and out of the house into the darkness. By the time he got outside, there was no sound to tell him which way the fugitives had

gone. Any successful search in the night was impossible, and he bitterly cursed his luck—or his poor judgment, for he wasn't sure which it was.

However, there was nothing for it now except to wait for daylight. He walked back into the house, confident that it would be short work to pick up the trail in the morning. He had no more than stepped into the hall than he became the object of Aunt Dode's attention. The dressing down which she gave the granite-faced officer was all that Lefty had promised. Sanborn tried to silence her by roaring at her, by showing his badge, by stalking past her as if she didn't exist—all to no purpose.

"I don't care who you are or what you are!" she wound up. "You can't come into this house and raise a rumpus like this this time of night! Now you get outta here and stay out! I wouldn't give you a bed if it was the last one in town! Get out!"

The sheriff got out, and spent the rest of the night in the livery barn. He took this with more equanimity than Lefty had expected.

"All in the day's work," he told the freighter the next morning. "I picked up the trail of Evans and his dog, all right. It heads down the river. I'll take it up as soon as I've had some breakfast. Do you suppose that termagant of a boarding house keeper will give me something to eat?"

"She ain't a termagant," Lefty told him, "though she is a crank about any racket in her house. Nobody can blame her for that. Yes, she'll feed you, if you come along with me and keep your face ironed out."

As the sheriff was saddling his

horse at the livery barn, later, he said to Lefty:

"What I don't savvy is how Evans knew so quickly that some one was after him. He was sound asleep. You'd think he'd've jumped out there and tried to haul the dog off."

Lefty suggested, "Maybe he heard your voice."

"No," replied Sanborn. "I was careful not to speak, for fear of just that. I kept mum even when the brute knocked me down, thinking I would nab Evans when he came out into the hall. I'm danged if I can figure what could've warned him."

ON the high seat of his freight wagon during the two-day trip out to the Buckram Mine, Lefty Pearl was not able to shake off his discomfort. Behind him, one of his drivers, "Trip" Gilbert, was following with a second freight outfit. Trip was going out to the mine empty, but Lefty's wagon was loaded with provisions.

The freighter could not yet reconcile himself to the idea that the quiet-faced, low-voiced Burke Evans was a killer. Possibly Lefty's bias arose from the fact that Burke was one of the best drivers he had. The freight contractor was short on drivers for his fifty-some outfits. He needed every man. Possibly, too, Lefty was influenced by the mutual devotion of Evans and his dog. The freighter had a weakness for animals, and for men who shared the weakness.

It was on the second afternoon out, and some eight miles from their destination, that Lefty sighted a man on horseback across a stretch of sagebrush mesa. He drew up his teams and eyed the approaching figure narrowly. Sure enough, it was Sanborn. Presently the sheriff came

into the road and sat on his horse, waiting for the freight wagons.

"So," said Lefty when they met, "the trail turned in this direction, did it?"

Sanborn nodded. "He followed the river down about fifteen miles and then doubled back. Laid in a pretty good stock of provisions at a coupla ranches, I found." The bleak features of the sheriff faced toward the broken country lying eastward, toward the top of a high divide.

Lefty followed his glance, and his thought. "Tough goin' out in those canyons," the freighter said.

"It's not the going that bothers me," was Sanborn's answer. "It's the fact that I don't know one danged thing about that country, except that it's the kind a man can mighty easy get lost in." He glanced at the lowering sky above him, which had been like that for days. This weather was the forerunner of the first autumn storm, and Sanborn was uneasy. "No sun to go by, no stars," he said.

Lefty remarked with a grin, "So, you're not the sort of fellow that never gets lost?"

Sanborn smiled briefly. "I've noticed that it's only inexperienced men who never get lost. Do you know," he asked, "where I could get a guide who could bring me out of there, once I got in?"

The freighter shook his head. "There might be some man up at the mine who's hunted through the country enough to be of use to you. It's only about eight miles on to the Buckram from here."

"I may lose my trail if I drop it now," Sanborn looked at Lefty. "How about you?"

"Me?" Lefty repeated blankly.

Sanborn continued to look at him. Lefty got it. The sheriff wasn't de-
WS—5C

manding anything of him. He would not compel him to act as a guide. He was asking him to help him out.

Trip Gilbert, stopped behind him, called:

"Hey, boss! We gotta get a move on us or we won't make it into the Buckram till after dark."

Lefty looked around at him, then at Sanborn again. The sheriff said:

"You carry a saddle on your wagon?"

"Yes."

"Your driver could lead that empty outfit behind this one, couldn't he?"

"Yes." Lefty sat thinking while the sheriff studied his face. At last, Sanborn remarked:

"That's not what's bothering you."

"No," Lefty confessed.

There was a silence; then the freighter straightened with a sigh. His gray glance met that of the sheriff, and he smiled without mirth.

"You don't force my hand," he told him, "and you don't say anything about my duty as a citizen. So I guess about all I can do is go with you."

He took one of the lead horses from Trip Gilbert's team, saddled it, contrived a bridle of sorts, made up a pack of food from the grub box under his seat, tied it in a slicker behind the cante, and mounted.

"Which," remarked Trip, as he hitched the halters of his outfit to the rear of Lefty's trail wagon, "is sure leavin' me high and dry."

"Be thankful," Sanborn told him, "that you're not the one that has to follow the trail of a killer."

It was a long trail. They lost it before dark and were not able to pick it up again until the next morning. Burke Evans, the sheriff told Lefty, had learned plenty about mixing a trail. The fugitive, wherever

possible, had used bare rocks and hard, uneven ground. The two men made slow progress the next day and were forced to bed down in a dry camp that night. But they were ready for any sort of bed, since most of the work had had to be done on foot. A man on horseback could not easily discern a worn boot track and the mark of a dog's pads.

"Why in the devil," said the sheriff as they cooked their frugal meal over a tiny flame, "doesn't it storm?"

LEFTY cast a weather-wise eye at the sky. "Due any time now," he answered. "I wouldn't be surprised if we found snow on the ground in the morning. But that'll just make it tougher for us. It'll cover up what little trail we have."

Sanborn, however, took a different view. "I'm sure we've got his general direction. He's getting tired, and the dog is getting footsore. He can't have much grub left by this time, and he's swinging east in the hope of finding another ranch."

Lefty admitted ruefully, "You can read signs better than I can. For all the tracks tell me, he might be outta the county before now."

"A little moisture," stated the sheriff, "would make the trail a lot easier to read."

The snow did not come till the middle of the next forenoon. Then it was a mere flurry, that melted as soon as it fell. Sanborn's guess as to the fugitive's direction was so accurate that they picked up the lost trail after two hours, and found the track fresh and clear in the newly dampened ground. On their horses, now, they could follow fast. Presently the sheriff asked:

"Why in the deuce would any man want to lay out a trap line among these piñons?"

"Coyotes," Lefty told him. "That's old Tim Kelly's line, I imagine. He lives up here the year round, and banks money from the coyote pelts he gets. By the look of a couple of traps I've spotted, he must've seen bear in here, too. The crop of piñon nuts has been heavy this fall, and that more'n likely coaxed the bears down outta the higher hills."

A half mile farther on a sound came to the ears of the two men. They pulled up their horses to listen. The piñons and scrub cedars stood thick here, but the sounds came through them distinctly in the still air.

Lefty guessed, "Something in one of old Kelly's traps."

When they located the source of the disturbance both stopped short and started. In one of the bear traps, caught by a fore leg, was the big brindle mastiff of Burke Evans. The giant dog was thrashing about in a frenzy of terror and rage, growling, yelping, biting, and tearing at the thing that held him.

The eyes of the sheriff gleamed. "Turn him loose," he said, "and he'll lead us to Evans, straight as a bullet."

They got down from their horses and approached the dog. He stood on three legs, bristling and snarling at them. Lefty looked around for a stick to thrust between his jaws. In that manner they could hold him until they could free his leg. But there wasn't a dry stick of any size in sight. Moreover, every time they approached the animal he menaced them so savagely that they dared not get too near him.

Lefty said, "He's going to break that leg, if he throws himself around much more."

The sheriff stood in scowling thought, studying the maddened ani-

mal. He spoke half to himself. "I believe I can do it." He drew out his gun.

Lefty flung out a hand in protest. "You're not going to kill him!"

"I believe," Sanborn answered, "that I can crease him. I've seen it done. That'll drop him till we can get him free of the trap. Then, when he recovers, we'll be on our horses and we can follow him."

Lefty demurred. "Too darned big a chance of killing him," was his opinion.

Sanborn shrugged. "Well, if I do, it's no great loss. He'd take me to Evans a little faster, but I'll get the fellow anyhow."

For once in his life Lefty Pearl could think of nothing to do or say. It seemed a crime to shoot down so magnificent an animal.

The sheriff drew back his gun hammer, poised, waiting for the dog to stand still. The mastiff seemed to understand what the gun meant. With renewed fury he flung himself against the steel jaws which held him.

Then through the piñons, clear as a bell, came a cry.

"Brin, stand still!"

Out from the trees ran a man, a dirty, disheveled, bearded, hollow-faced man. He ran stumblingly, for his shoe soles had torn loose from the uppers. The intent eyes in the haggard face were fixed on the dog. They seemed not to see the two men standing by. In the hand of Burke Evans was a stout club.

The great mastiff stood like a statue as his master ran up to him. He whined with eagerness and affectionately nosed the ragged clothing as Burke stooped to shove the end of his stick between the jaws of the trap. Plainly, he had gone to find this when the mastiff was caught, and had come back to discover his

pursuers. Slowly he pried the steel jaws apart.

"Lift it out," he said, his voice so gentle that both spectators started at the sound of it.

The brindle dog obeyed and whimpered with pain as he tried to set his injured paw on the ground. Burke sat down and took the paw between his hands. He examined the leg carefully, touching it with light fingers. Then he opened his ragged coat, pulled it off, and tore the sleeve out of his shirt. In a minute more he had this in strips and was deftly bandaging the injured limb.

SANBORN and Lefty were standing above him, watching. Burke finished his work with a last twist and a flat, neat knot. He patted the paw and set the foot down, then looked up. He met Lefty's eyes, and then glanced at the sheriff.

But Sanborn was not looking at him. The granite features of the officer were set in a scowl, his eyes intent on the mastiff. He said suddenly and sharply:

"Do that again!"

Both Lefty and Burke looked at him blankly.

"Do it again!" he ordered.

Burke stammered, "Wh-at?"

"Tie that knot again," said Sanborn. "Tie it exactly as you did before."

The face of the man on the ground wore a dazed expression as he started to obey.

"Take that strip of cloth you didn't use," the sheriff told him. "Tie another knot below the one you've already made."

Burke did as he was ordered, and again set the dog's foot down. The mastiff was standing perfectly quiet, showing no sign of savagery toward

the other men while his master was at hand.

Sanborn, gun dangling in his fingers, was looking from the bandaged leg to Burke and back again. Burke got to his feet, and Lefty saw how thin he had become during his flight. His sunken eyes watched the sheriff, dully questioning. He avoided Lefty's glance.

Sanborn, at last, said slowly, "You didn't kill Cravell."

Burke stared at the speaker, and his face hardened, a faint red creeping into his gray cheeks. Lefty saw that he misunderstood, and said:

"He ain't bein' sarcastic, Burke. He means it."

"M-means it?" stammered Burke.

Sanborn nodded. "It was a bow-line knot, all right, that was used on Cravell, but it wasn't made the way you make yours. Yours is flatter, smoother. Evans, you got any idea who might've killed Cravell?"

Burke Evans choked on his answer. He was so stunned over this unexpected turn of affairs that he could scarcely find words.

"I—well, I—"

The eyes of the sheriff bored into him. "You have got an idea, then?"

"I—well, I ain't got any proof."

"We'll keep it under our hats till we get the proof," Sanborn promised him. "Of course, I'll have to take you in."

Burke nodded, the incredulous relief and dawning hope in his face so poignant that both men looked away.

Sanborn said gruffly, "We better open up our grub packs, Lefty."

The three sat on the ground while both dog and man were eating, and the sheriff asked:

"What made you guess, the other night in Pelley Bend, that something was up?"

Burke told him, "I'd heard just

that day who the new county sheriff was. I'd made up my mind to pull out before daylight. I had written a note to Lefty telling him I had to leave. I was gonna slip it under Aunt Dode's door." For the first time the hint of a smile appeared on Burke's gaunt face. "I bet she was sore about that window. You'll have to take it outta my wages, Lefty."

Lefty answered, "You'll need what money you got comin'. I'll tend to it, and you can make it up when you come back to work for me."

Burke said hesitatingly, "You're—you're so darn good about everything—could I ask something else?"

"Shoot," was Lefty's response.

"Well—could you take care of Brin?"

Lefty cocked a doubtful eye at the mastiff.

"Oh, he'll be all right," Burke reassured him. "Brin, come here."

The dog at once left the bone he was gnawing and came to stand beside his master, limping on the injured leg. Burke put an arm across his neck.

"Brin, I'm going away." The tail of the big mastiff wagged violently. "No, you're not going with me." The tail stopped. Brin lowered his head and whined his protest. "You will stay with Lefty here." Burke laid his hand on the freighter's knee. "Lefty is my friend," and to Lefty, "Call him."

Lefty was dubious of the result, but he spoke in a natural tone.

"Come here, Brin."

To the astonishment of the sheriff and of the freighter, the mastiff came and stood at Lefty's shoulder. The freighter touched him with a light hand, rubbed him gently about the ears. At first the dog stood stiff, merely submitting. Then he pushed

a little against the hand, and finally squatted beside the man with the mute request that these attentions be continued.

Burke heaved a sigh of relief. "I knew he'd obey me, but I didn't really have much hope that he'd make up with you."

"And to think," murmured San-

born, "that by the sheer chance of that brute getting caught in a trap, you're on your road to freedom."

Lefty objected to the reasoning. "Brin's gettin' caught was chance, maybe, but it ain't chance that makes a man face capture and prison to save his dog. That's what some folks call character."

Coming Next Week, "BUSKIN BRONCHOBUSTER,"

by LLOYD ERIC REEVE.

A NEW GOLD DETECTOR

THE only tried and tested method of ascertaining what is in the ground is to dig. From time to time we hear about magnetic needles which will point to anything in the earth that is worth looking for. We read about a certain person who will cut off a stout limb from an apple tree, and with this limb—preferably forked—will trail along the ground searching for water. Suddenly the limb will jump or buckle or wrench itself from the person's hand and that means that any number of feet underground is a bubbling spring. The skeptic will hear the story, and will try it himself over the same piece of ground. The apple-tree limb refuses to perform for him.

"There!" exclaims the skeptic, "I told you it was your imagination."

"It depends upon the magnetic power in the person," says the other, and taking the stick from the skeptic he proceeds to go over the magic spot. With his own eyes the skeptic sees the limb behave in a peculiar manner, but, being a skeptic, he is convinced that the other man leaned on it or stumbled against it or did some trick. And since neither man is interested in digging a well at that particular point, not knowing how many feet he would have to go, the proof is never brought to bear.

There have been countless devices to ascertain various ores, and each invention has its followers and its unbelievers. Now comes W. C. Reynolds, of Bluffton, Ohio, who believes he has invented a machine that will discover gold even though it may be a mile in the ground. The machine is said to develop radio refraction waves which are affected by the atomic weight of gold.


In a building, Reynolds and his helpers put twenty-six metals at various points. The indicator pointed only to the gold. Nothing will interfere except some metal of the gold family.

The inventor has been working on the machine for twelve years. He claims that he can detect the richest vein of gold, and even tell how much gold per ton of ore can be smelted from the deposit.

"I can actually hear the gold in the ground," said Mr. Reynolds. "The volume of sound is used to calculate the amount of ore beneath the surface."

Interesting And True

By H. FREDRIC YOUNG



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CONTRARY TO POP-
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TEXAS RIGHTFULLY
BELONGS TO SPAIN.
IN 1819 THE UNITED STATES
CEDED ALL THE LAND SOUTH
OF THE RED RIVER, AND
WEST OF THE SABINE
RIVER, TO SPAIN. NO
SUBSEQUENT TREATY
HAS EVER BEEN MADE



MEXICO

5

Mr. Young will pay one dollar for any usable Western "Interesting And True" features which readers may send him in care of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y. Return postage must be included for suggestions found unsuitable.

THE CHANCE OF A YELLOW DOG

By KENNETH GILBERT

Author of "The Miracle At Wolf Pass," etc.

THE hot afternoon wind sweeping up from the Talking River Canyon was suddenly infused with a scent that would stir alarm in any wild creature, and the half-grown coyote which Matt Thayer had tried unsuccessfully to tame, and which had at last escaped, tensed in vague excitement. Its quick brain said that the man-smell was usually linked with death. But this—



Despite that warning of a human being's presence in the canyon, the coyote presently went padding furtively over the sun-heated rocks and down into it. For, the keen nose of the wolfish creature revealed that the man-thing was young, helpless. The coyote hated Matt Thayer with all the instinctive aversion of its kind, and it knew, cunningly, that Thayer's child was alone down there beside the rushing waters of the noisy river.

As it trotted sure-footedly down the face of the cliff, it looked for all the world like a yellow dog.

That was its name—Yellow Dog. Matt Thayer had called it that after pulling five coyote pups out of a rocky burrow the previous spring. Noting the den signs—tracks in the sand, a bleached bone, a few scattered feathers—and catching a glimpse of the lank mother coyote watching anxiously from a distance, he had cut a long and tough strand of wild blackberry vine, thrust it into the hole, and twisted the sharp spines into the fur of each pup. The youngsters were dragged forth, mewling in protest. Four of them met a merciful end on the spot, for their scalps would bring a neat bounty. The fifth was kept as something to show "Skipper," Thayer's three-year-old son.

It was a fuzzy little ball of soft, grayish fur, and its newly-opened

eyes—which indicated that it could probably never be tamed—were an opaque blue, but would ultimately become greenish-yellow. There was wildness in those babyish eyes even then, and the tiny captive regarded the man with fear and distrust.

Matt Thayer was a whimsical man with a kind heart. "Poor little cuss!" The pup seemed meekly resigned to the fate that had overtaken its brothers and sisters. "Born a thief, a killer, with the hand of everybody against you. You haven't the chance of a yellow dog!"

As the pup shed its baby fur and acquired its natural coat of gray and lemon, the name was more appropriate than ever. The little coyote seemed to have the craven realization that in all the world—save among its own kind—there was no sympathy for it. Its courage—and it did possess that in a peculiar way—was hidden by a skulking manner of fear and wariness, as though nerves and muscles were constantly taut, ready to respond for instant flight. But it did accept Skipper, who was obviously too young to intend harm, and likewise Duke, Thayer's aristocratic setter pup, whose comical, playful antics and friendly offers struck odd response in the coyote's wild heart.

Matt Thayer, grinning tolerantly at Skipper's delight in the new pet, and likewise as it entered into the bird dog pup's mad, harmless nonsense, wondered, however, as to the outcome. He had misgivings over his act in bringing the coyote pup home.

WOULD it ever become tame and trustworthy? Would its delicate, sensitive nose and remarkable bird-finding ability, which the rancher knew is the heritage of every coyote, be helpful—as

he had hoped—in developing Duke's hunting instinct? The latter sounded far-fetched, but the novelty of the idea appealed to the man. It might be worth trying.

Yet disillusionment came swiftly as Yellow Dog—for that had become his name—grew rapidly and thrived upon kindly care and the plentiful food given him. He was four months old when the evil in his nature asserted itself.

Thayer was awakened one night by a commotion in the chicken yard. He grabbed his gun and a lamp and ran outside, to find the birds in terrified confusion. Feathers were strewn about the place and, after a check-up, he saw that a young hen was missing. There was a hole dug in the soft earth under the edge of the pen, and just outside this he found the bird, dead. Whatever thing had killed it had evidently been frightened off by his quick appearance.

He was about to conclude that it was the work of a prowling skunk when he thought of Yellow Dog, and he took a look at the run where the young coyote was kept. There was a hole where the wire mesh had been loosely secured, and Yellow Dog was gone.

Thayer went back to the house, convinced that he would never see the coyote again. But next morning Yellow Dog was hanging around the barn, acting shy and guilty. The dead chicken had disappeared.

Even then he forgave the thief, realizing that it was but the nature of Yellow Dog asserting itself. He managed to coax the coyote back into the run with the aid of a plate of meat scraps, and made sure that the wire mesh was tight at all points. He had almost forgotten the incident, and Yellow Dog seemed to be growing actually tame. One day

he took the coyote out on a rope along with Duke, in giving the young setter a lesson in handling ring-necked pheasants, for the shooting season was not far off.

It was great fun for Duke, and Yellow Dog likewise grew so eager that Thayer finally untied him, to see what he would do. Like a tawny bullet he shot ahead to where Duke, matchless in beauty as he stood on point where a big ring-necked rooster crouched in the grass, waited obediently for Thayer to come up.

That sort of hunting was correct for Duke, but it seemed like nonsense to the coyote. Yellow Dog flashed past Duke, breaking the dog's point, and, in a silent, arrowy leap, caught the ring-necked just as the big bird was taking off.

Duke blinked incredibly for an instant, then, as though ashamed of his own seeming lack of prowess, leaped in and helped Yellow Dog worry the struggling bird. And Thayer, hurrying up in anger and disgust, knew that Yellow Dog had done Duke incalculable damage. It would take hard work to make the dog steady on point again. Always he would want to go bounding in to seize the game, even as he had seen the coyote do.

ONLY tearful intervention by Skipper saved Yellow Dog when Thayer got back to the house. Three weeks later the coyote escaped from its pen and killed four of Mrs. Thayer's prime turkeys.

The angry rancher determined there would be no more fooling. Maybe a whipping would correct the coyote, as it might in the case of a refractory dog. Thayer cornered Yellow Dog in the barn, but the coyote, snapping viciously, dodged past him and fled to the sagebrush, and Thayer had a slashed thumb

where the beast's fangs had clicked together like knives.

Infuriated, Thayer got his gun. Yellow Dog, as though realizing that all ties with civilization were broken now, had stopped on a rise about four hundred yards distant. Thayer was a good shot, but he was too angry to take careful aim. Nevertheless, the bullet ripped through the flesh of Yellow Dog's shoulder, and the coyote fled in mad panic.

But he came back, although he never showed himself. Time after time he raided the chicken pen, and ordinary wire was of no avail against the skill of his strong teeth and jaws. Thayer waited for him with a gun at night, and even set many traps, but Yellow Dog evaded these easily. War was on in earnest, and it seemed as though Yellow Dog would not rest until he had exacted vengeance to the fullest against the man who had made him captive and sought to deprive him of his rightful heritage of the wild. Yellow Dog—and who could say what thoughts smoldered in the cunning brain behind those clear gold eyes?—may have even remembered that dread moment when the man pulled him from the burrow and killed the coyote's brothers and sisters.

If revenge was in the mind of the beast that looked like a slinking yellow dog, then never was finer opportunity offered than now. The coyote, by reason of its familiarity with man, had a courage not possessed by its wilder brethren. And the man-child—the thing that was part of Thayer's heart and soul—was unguarded down there by the river.

Halfway down the canyon side, Yellow Dog paused suddenly, then leaped aside. In the silence that hung over the place, aside from the whispering of the river far below, there was an ominous buzzing sound

close by, and as Yellow Dog dodged, a mottled, ropy length was flung at him from beneath the shelter of an overhanging rock. But the coyote was too quick for the strike of the rattlesnake, and his snarl was one of disdain. He knew all about the death that lay in those poison fangs, and he was born with deftness and skill enough to kill rattlers when the need arose. He had no time for that now, however.

On and on down the canyon, until he stood at last on the floor of it. There he sank low and began a stealthy stalk, to make certain that the baby was really alone. Without a sound he came close at last, and stood there for a long moment while he considered Skipper, who was unquestionably lost, and whose dusty face was streaked with the tears that could not be fought back, even though he made a manful effort to do so.

The eyes of Yellow Dog, cold and brilliant, never changed expression. Suddenly the baby, as though aware that he was being subjected to a basilisk gaze, turned and saw the silent watcher. He blinked in astonishment, took a step forward, and Yellow Dog crouched abruptly, upper lips wrinkling until the snow-white fighting fangs were exposed. At that instant there was a shout from the top of the cliff.

MATT THAYER had returned to the house at noon after a search for a straying cow and calf, and, because there was a chance that he might get a glimpse of Yellow Dog, against whom he had sworn the death feud, he carried his rifle. As he entered the yard of his home, his wife met him worriedly.

"I thought you had taken Skipper

with you," she explained. "I haven't seen him for hours."

Sudden fear clutched at the man's heart. "Haven't seen him since morning. I'll look around."

"I'll go with you." She had the premonition that all mothers feel. The country was wide and empty; a little boy could stray far. And there were innumerable dangers for a child.

But the first search revealed nothing. The pair went farther afield, still without results. Suddenly, Mrs. Thayer had a dread.

"The—river!" She faltered. "You've taken him fishing with you. Do you suppose——"

Matt Thayer's face grew more strained. The Talking River was swift and treacherous; it had no shallows. Suppose Skipper had gone there, and had gone wading!

"Come on!" Matt Thayer was abrupt. "If he's there, I'll know where to look." At a swift pace they set off for the canyon, at the bottom of which were deep holes where big trout lurked. The boy had been taken there several times, and probably knew the way.

Without speaking they hurried on. At last they reached the lip of the canyon, and hardly dared look down. If Skipper were not there, there could be but one grim assumption—that the river had claimed him.

But the tableau they did see was something wholly unexpected. Their horrified eyes picked out Skipper—a puzzled and fearful little boy who stood in pleasant surprise, hands extended before him. Less than six feet from him crouched the grizzled-yellow form of the coyote, whose instinctive fear of man had been overcome by association with the breed.

Swiftly, Matt Thayer swung up the rifle, and the smooth stock nestled against his cheek. But the

mother cried out, "No, Matt! You might hit the baby!" Then a second later, "Look, Matt, look!"

From that height they could not make out exactly what was happening. But they did see Yellow Dog flatten suddenly, then leap. Skipper staggered backward.

At the moment the boy started toward him, Yellow Dog's old suspicions of the human clan came back with a rush, and he snarled. Then he remembered that this baby was harmless, that it had, in fact, indicated friendliness. Moreover, the playful setter pup, Duke, had likewise been fond of Skipper. A poignant loneliness came into Yellow Dog's soul, and he whined.

"Good doggy!" said Skipper. The coyote to him was just another dog; it was beyond his understanding to realize that Yellow Dog was actually a wolf. "Good doggy! Come here!"

Yellow Dog did not understand the words, yet the tone of voice did not escape him. An expression almost of mildness came into his eyes. Trembling, he took a step nearer. Somehow he felt a yearning to be caressed by those soft hands. At that instant he heard Matt Thayer shout from the top of the hill.

His nature, the nature of the wolf, came uppermost. He snarled again, as though he suspected that this was a trap. He would have turned and scuttled swiftly from the place if his knowing ear had not caught a dread sound.

An ominous buzzing. He knew at once what it was. This canyon, which was always warm, yet whose rocks likewise afforded the necessary shade, was a favorite haunt of rattle-snakes. Little Skipper had been unconsciously standing within striking distance of scaly death when Yellow

Dog had appeared. The boy's step forward, the single movement, had aroused the snake. The coyote saw the thing coiled within striking distance, beside a clump of bunch grass. Aroused and alarmed, the snake was setting itself for the blow.

Yellow Dog hated snakes. They personified death, even as men did, but at least they could be killed. Ten thousand generations of coyotes had implanted in him the cunning and skill necessary to accomplish it. That same heritage had given him the quickness of light, a marvelous coördination of mind and muscle—and it had given him an intelligent brain. Like an unwound steel spring, he leaped—but as quickly drew back.

The feint was enough. The snake lashed out at this new enemy which—remarkably—wasn't there. But a fraction of a second later, before the serpent could recover, Yellow Dog went in again, and this time his symmetrically-pointed jaws opened and closed just behind the crotaline head with its lidless eyes.

There was a muffled snapping sound, like the soft breaking of a twig—and Yellow Dog had flung the squirming body ten feet from him. Again he lunged forward, giving the crippled snake no opportunity to regain its fighting position. Again his fangs met, crushing the spine. Literally frothing his hatred, he sprang again and again at the rattler until there was no movement in the long, sinuous body, save the twitching of severed nerves. Then, shaken with nausea, he staggered away into the brush. When the Thayers finally reached the bottom of the canyon, and had caught up little Skipper, who had stood there during all the battle as if gripped by the hypnotic spell of fear, Yellow Dog was no longer in sight.

Mrs. Thayer was sobbing in her joy, and Matt Thayer found himself swallowing, while his eyes burned and a mist swam before them. Skipper, however, his shock of terror quickly gone, was wildly excited now. He wanted to tell them of the wonderful thing that had happened, as though they had not been compelled to watch the horrifying spectacle in mute helplessness. The little boy fairly chattered praise of Yellow Dog, who had killed the "big, big 'nake."

The mother looked at the gun in Matt Thayer's hand, then reproachfully at her husband. "Jim, you were going to shoot Yellow Dog! If anything ever happens to that coyote—if you——"

"How'd you suppose I feel?" he demanded defensively. "Say, I've a notion to leave your turkey pen open to-night, just as an invitation to Yellow Dog to help himself!"

She smiled at him through tearful eyes. Of course he didn't mean it;

still, she knew how he must feel toward Yellow Dog. They went homeward slowly, while the sun dipped into the bluish haze of the hills.

And from afar Yellow Dog watched them go. Somehow he knew that this was farewell, so far as all association with mankind was concerned. The last ties that had bound him to human beings were broken. Henceforth he would go his own way—hated by all but his kind, the hand of the world against him. Never would he know the kindness of a human voice, the touch of a human hand; his reward, if any, would be poison, or a bullet.

Perhaps he wanted no favors from man. And yet, as he sat atop a knoll, the poignant loneliness which seems to be in the soul of every coyote, took possession of him. He'd never had the chance of a yellow dog. He lifted his nose toward the unfriendly heavens, his throat tightened, and he wailed—to the unseen Creator who alone understood him.

WHITE MAN'S WHITE MAGIC

THERE is apparently no limit to what a good salesman can sell. Time and again, the Brooklyn Bridge and Grand Central Station in New York have been sold to gullible newcomers to the city. But perhaps the greatest achievement in the selling line goes to the man who recently sold an ice box to an Eskimo.

Eskimos as a rule have their own ice boxes provided by nature. They need only thrust a hand out of the igloo door and pick up as many ice cubes, or the equivalent to ice cubes, as they wish.

But the Eskimo who bought the electric refrigerator was suffering from the heat at the Canadian National Exhibition being held in Toronto. He and some of his countrymen missed their ice, and when an enterprising salesman gave them a demonstration of his electric ice box, there was no hesitation on the part of one of the Eskimos. He bought the contraption then and there. It reminded him of home. He could creep inside if he wanted to and keep cool. His friends at the exhibition admired the purchase with unstinted praise. Everybody was pleased, including the salesman.



RED TRAIL TO BLACK TREASURE

PART IV.

By LUKE SHORT

CHRISTINA MELLISH, sister of Big Ben Mellish, owner of the large Anchor Ranch, seeks refuge in the home of her old friend, Doctor Benbow, when she learns that Ben is hiring gunmen to intimidate the other ranchers in the Seven Troughs basin. There she meets Pete Yard, formerly an employee of Senator Matthew Warranrode at the latter's vast GW Ranch. Yard, a patient, has been brutally flogged. Christina reads in the *State Register*, edited by Steve Trueblood, that the Federal government is plan-

ning a huge dam at Antelope Butte, near by. Yard evinces keen interest.

Warranrode, in a talk with his foreman, Ames Manderfield, discloses that he is back of the dam project, and that by bribery he has secured passage of a bill that will reduce the size of the Ute Reservation, near the proposed dam site. In this, he has an ally in Major Linkman, agent at the reservation. When the Ute excess land is auctioned, Warranrode will have it bid in by Schumacher and Lassiter, owners of ranches adjoining. These two will

be "dummy" buyers, actually buying for the senator, who has learned the land is rich in coal. Warranrode has hired Ben Mellish to fight the basin ranchers, so that they, too, will get panicky and sell out. Warranrode had sent Pete Yard to handle Trueblood, a crusading editor, but Trueblood converted Yard to his own cause. In reprisal, Warranrode had sent Manderfield to beat up Yard. The senator hopes Trueblood will be killed in the ranchers' war stirred up by Mellish.

Sylvia Warranrode, the senator's daughter, loves Yard, but her feelings are not reciprocated, Yard being in love with Christina Mellish.

The ranchers call a meeting to take a concerted stand against the dam project; but, despite Trueblood's warning that the project is a "plain land steal," with Mellish working against their interests, they cannot get unanimity of action. Sheriff Nance, a relative of Mellish's, loyally denies that Mellish is involved. Mellish, meanwhile, has gone to Warranrode's and asked the senator to offer a five-thousand-dollar reward for the murderer of Mellish's brother, Frank, claiming Yard is the culprit. The senator readily agrees.

Mellish organizes a raid on Swan Ullman's ranch, but through Yard's efforts the raid is repulsed. Meanwhile, Yard, knowing Mellish will make tracks to Sheriff Nance and ask him to serve a warrant for his, Yard's, arrest on the trumped-up murder charge, goes to Seven Troughs and kidnaps the sheriff. He and Trueblood take the sheriff to a hide-out in the mountains, hoping to be able to convince the lawman of Yard's innocence and show him that Mellish is a villain.

Before striking out with the sheriff, Yard, in Seven Troughs, had met

both Sylvia and Christina, and, to Christina's surprise, had introduced Christina as his "fiancée." Christina now goes to Major Linkman's house, where Sylvia is stopping, to deny she is Yard's fiancée. While she is there, the major is mysteriously murdered, and a glove belonging to Ben Mellish is found at his side. Christina picks up this glove and hides it. Yard returns to Seven Troughs and meet Christina. He tells her that, despite the glove, Ben could not have murdered Linkman. Yard then meets Sylvia, at the hotel, and, learning of his love for Christina, she reluctantly gives him up. While leaving the hotel, Yard is spotted by Mellish's men and captured. In jail, he tells Mellish about the glove, in such a way as to imply very strongly that Mellish has been framed by his own employer, Warranrode.

CHAPTER XIII.

PETE RIDES ALONE.

BLAKE had brought him his breakfast hours ago, and Pete had smoked until his mouth was dry before he heard the deep rumble of Ben Mellish's voice out in the office. It was not gentle, this morning, and while Pete was trying to catch the tenor of his conversation, he heard Nance's voice, too. It broke off suddenly, and the jail door swung open and Nance entered. He was unshaven, and bits of dirt and leaves still clung to his clothes. Ben Mellish was behind him, wearing that harried truculence on his face that had lately become a part of him.

Steve Trueblood, homely and silent and watchful, came last.

Pete looked at each of them as Ben reached out and whirled Nance around to face him. Steve looked

back into the office and then stood beside the door, his hand on his gun.

Ben said, "Nance, I've got twenty men out there that will cut him to doll rags the minute he steps out of that office!"

"That," Nance said flatly, unpleasantly, "is bluff."

Steve drawled, "If they try it, you'd better be clean out of sight, Mellish."

Ben watched with a kind of fascinated rage as Nance put the cell key up to its lock. Then Ben backed against the bars, swiftly drawing his gun so that it covered both Nance and Steve.

"He stays in there," Ben said ominously. "Nance, you put out reward posters and five thousand dollars. If you've lost your mind, I reckon I haven't. You can't play with murder."

Nance gave one level look at Ben and said abruptly: "You crazy bull-head. Put up that gun or I'll have you in here next. I'm sheriff of this county, dead or alive, and I'm openin' this cell, dead or alive. If you think you can fight this town and the rest of this county on top of the whole north basin, just let that thing off." And with easy unconcern he unlocked the cell door and opened it. Without looking at Ben, he said to Pete: "Come out. There's no charge against you."

Ben said thickly, "Stay in there!"

Nance swiveled his gaze at him. "Ben," he drawled gently, "put up that gun," and he walked toward Ben. It was a long two seconds. Stubborn and savage as Ben was, there was still a sanity in him, and behind the murderous rage in his eyes was caution—and fear.

When Nance stretched out his hand to take the gun, Ben lowered it, but growled, "You've started a

thing you'll never finish now, Nance."

Nance nodded grimly. "Get into the office, the lot of you. I've got my speech to make yet."

When Pete had his gun again, he stood beside the desk, Steve a little behind him. Ben stood by the half-open door. Outside, still on their horses, Pete could see the Anchor riders, waiting. Beyond them, and on the far sidewalk close to the Legal Tender, a little knot of silent, watchful men lounged. These were the basin ranchers.

Nance sat down and talked to Ben. "For ten years, Ben, I thought Dave Mellish was doin' the wrong thing by lettin' those nesters settle on the bottom lands and prairie that he could rightfully claim. And when you started to do somethin' about it, I backed you up." He pointed a blunt finger at Ben. "But I don't back up any man's steal—even if he's a United States senator."

Pete was grinning faintly as Ben's hot gaze shuttled to him.

NANCE went on: "If you'd fought for this land for yourself, I might have overlooked the way you went about it. Even if you'd taken this land into a company and let the court settle it, I might have thought that was a little cheaper than hirin' riders for ten years to back up your fence. But my blood or not, I'll not back you up when you steal it for a crook."

Ben said sneeringly, "Then you've swung over to that nester rabble?"

"I haven't swung anywhere," Nance said grimly, "except back to plumb center. I won't promise to settle all the trouble that goes on in this basin, but I can promise you this—I'll worry the devil out of the man that steps out of line!"

"Maybe you'd like to start on the

outfit that burned two hundred tons of my hay last night," Ben said darkly.

Steve shifted slightly, and Pete did not look at him.

"I will," Nance said. "If you've got a legal complaint, you bring it to me."

Ben laughed softly, without mirth. "I won't bring anything to you, Nance. I've brought the last thing to you I ever will—except a pack of trouble." He looked at Pete. "You made a poor choice, Yard. In jail, you might have lived."

"Which might be said for you, Ben," Pete murmured. "When you're not certain of that, remember that glove."

Ben left, slamming the door behind him, and there was movement among the riders outside.

Steve's homely face was set in a frown, and he was observing Pete as Nance rose and watched from the window.

"What glove?" Steve said curiously.

"Ben Mellish's. Somebody planted it by Linkman the other night when they shot him."

Nance turned abruptly. "Linkman? Major Linkman killed?"

"Shot."

Steve directed a long, wondering, bitterly reproving look at Pete, then walked over to the window beside Nance and looked out.

"Well," Steve said bitterly, "so that's where we end up? Right where we began."

"I wonder," Pete murmured.

Steve half turned and looked at him; then he picked up his hat and, without a word, walked to the door.

"Hold on," Nance said. "I'm tellin' you two exactly what I told Ben. The first one of you that cuts loose his dogs in this basin has got me to reckon with."

Steve didn't bother to answer. He stepped out to the walk, and Pete followed. Bitterly, Steve regarded the sunny street, and without a word he swung under the hitch rack and headed for the Legal Tender.

Inside, at the bar, he said to the bartender, "I want the biggest bottle of the reddest paint you've got," and when he got the whisky, he chose a table in a far corner. Pete sat down beside him, and Steve poured out two drinks; but before he drank his, he said accusingly: "You knew about Linkman last night. You knew before you sent Ed and Leston and me up to the Anchor to burn that hay."

"Yes."

STEVE didn't look at him. He continued stubbornly: "Why did you do it? I don't mind it for myself, Pete, but you should never have sent those other two up there, knowing what you did about Linkman. Because our fight is busted. Linkman was the only man we could have reached to get evidence on Matt Warranrode. And Linkman is dead. And all the fighting we do now is water that should be under the bridge."

Pete listened with head bowed, eyes musing, toying with his glass of whisky.

"Because, old son, we're licked," Steve went on wearily. "Warranrode is a thorough man. Without our lifting a finger, he'll take care of Mellish. But not before Ben Mellish burns and bushwhacks those poor devils till they curse the day they saw us."

Pete sipped his whisky in silence, not looking at Steve.

"Ed was right," Steve murmured. "You're a hard man, Pete—harder on your friends than on your enemies."

Pete flushed a little at that and his mouth drew tight, but still he toyed with his glass, silent. Steve rose and laid a hand on Pete's shoulder and said: "Let me blow off. It's not every day a man loses a fight like that." He walked up to the bar and said something to the bartender, who extended him a box of cigars. Steve took a handful and rammed them in his shirt pocket. Then he came back and sat down. He laid one beside Pete. "One for you. Five for me. By the time I'm finished with the last one, carry me over to the Exchange House and put me to bed."

Slowly, Pete turned his head, and saw Steve touch a match to his cigar. And not so slowly, Pete reached over and took it out of his mouth and broke it, rising half out of his seat, throwing the cigar on the floor. He said to Steve in a choked voice: "I have made many a wrong guess about men in my life, Steve, but I always claimed I could see the yellow on a man's back through his clothes. I reckon I'll back down on that claim, here and now, because up till now I missed seein' yours."

He rose and placed both hands on the table, leaning toward Steve, his somber face savage with anger. "I can carry this alone. And when I can't, you can sit down to that printin' press of yours and lay out in type, 'Here dies a man that tried to finish what he started!'"

Steve rose out of his chair so quickly that it tumbled over backward. And Pete, straightening up with him, was suddenly aware that this room packed with men had fallen silent. But it was not the silence of men who are watching a brewing fight; it was a flat and warning silence, and instantly, Pete swiveled his head.

Tim Blake, tough and arrogant
WS-6C

and disdainful, stood just within the door of the Legal Tender. He saw Pete, and he started toward him, ignoring every other man in this room. Six feet from Pete, he stopped, and the lip-lifted sneer on his hard-muscled face was more vicious than his voice as he said: "Yard, Ben says your boys have called the turn. The next time I see you, it'll be keno. And if you want to make it this time, I'll take that up, too."

Pete's hand was not an inch from his glass of whisky. He looked down at it. Then, with a throaty laugh, he picked it up and threw it in Blake's face.

THERE was no collision, only the slap of hard flesh on flesh as Pete's hand settled on Blake's wrist, which was moving to lift that last inch of gun barrel clear of the holster top.

Blake's shoulder sagged down under the driving twist of Pete's hand, and the gun clattered to the floor.

Pete's other hand had gathered Blake's vest and shirt into a tight-fisted wad, and heaving with shoulder muscles corded, Pete lifted him clear of the floor. He hit him in the face. Then, folding him over his shoulder, Pete strode past the bar and sent the swing doors crashing aside. Never pausing in his stride, he straightened his arm and threw Blake out into the soft dust of the street. It stirred around the fallen man as Pete raised his eyes to see Ben Mellish and his riders ringed in a silent group in the street.

Pete said thickly: "Too much talk, Ben! Will you take it now or wait?"

He was taut with anger, almost blind with rage.

"Speak up, man!"

Ben Mellish said, "I'll wait." To

one of his men, he said, "Pick that fool up."

Pete turned back into the saloon. He singled out Steve—Steve, who was closest to the door and who had his gun in his hand.

Pete said to him: "I'm not done with what I had to say, Steve. I'm ridin' out of here. I'll bring back what you want—Linkman or no Linkman. Then maybe you'll pay attention and listen."

He tramped out and upstreet into the feed stable, and a moment later rode south out of town.

From the street, Steve saw him, and he swore long and fervently—and then sat down on the edge of the board walk, because his knees were too unsteady to hold him.

CHAPTER XIV.

A RUSE THAT WORKED.

THE second day of riding put Pete almost across the Ute Reservation, and on that afternoon he met a Ute buck and his two half-grown sons who pointed out to him the southern reservation boundary. Beyond that would be Lassiter's Chevron range, and Pete was well into it by nightfall. He felt and knew himself to be a man alone now, for Steve was lost to him.

A stranger in these vast Lowenweep breaks, Pete had to move slowly, but by the next afternoon he had found a brush corral by a spring at the head of a box canyon. That night, when a band of horses came to water there, Pete drove them into the corral. An hour later, the first step of his plan was completed. From this band he had cut out a runty black gelding, shod. This horse still carried his winter coat of hair, showing that he had not been ridden this spring. The gelding bore the Chevron brand.

Next morning, after Pete had pried the gelding's left front shoe off, he headed across the breaks toward Wheeler, a cattle-shipping point on the transcontinental and seat of Humboldt County. He was leading the black gelding, which, after a half day's travel over this rocky terrain, was lamed.

At Wheeler, Pete sought out the courthouse, which was converted from an old saloon and fronted on the wide and dusty road that paralleled the tracks. After a fifteen-minute conversation with Burke, the Humboldt County sheriff, they adjourned to the sidewalk, and while Pete remained silent, Sheriff Burke looked at the black gelding.

Burke was past middle age, a shrewd-eyed, ruddy-faced man who accepted Pete's information that he was Welch, a new deputy of Nance's, without suspicion. He wore a black, flat-brimmed Stetson with a leather belt for a hatband, and now he cuffed it off his forehead.

"This is the pony, huh?"

Pete nodded.

"Lamed, you say?"

Again Pete nodded and said: "They found the shoe. I got it in my blankets."

"I'll be with you in a minute," Burke said, and went off to get his horse.

They rode the twelve miles to Lassiter's place in easy time, Pete leading the black gelding. The Chevron house squatted against the base of a bare, red butte, and was a low, rambling affair of adobe, with a dirt roof and slab additions to either side of the long, low porch. Pole corrals and sheds lay around it, and it had the sun-baked, shadeless appearance of any dry-country ranch.

Approaching it, Sheriff Burke said,

"I don't know Lassiter so good, but you let me talk."

Pete stirred himself out of his air of indifferent laziness long enough to agree.

Lassiter was working out in the corrals, and a shout from the cook brought him to the house. He was an angular, taciturn man of medium height and weight, with a straw-colored mustache, ragged and full, which hid what must have been a rather grim mouth. To Pete, who eyed him lazily, he might have been a retired ranch foreman.

BURKE shook hands with him and introduced Pete, and then jerked a thumb toward the gelding whose lead rope was tied to the saddle of Pete's ground-halter horse.

"Your horse, Jim?" Burke asked, and sat down on the porch. Pete followed suit.

Lassiter walked over to the pony and looked at it and said, "He's wearin' my brand, ain't he?"

"Sure," Burke agreed. He gave Lassiter time to come back and sit down beside him and roll a smoke.

"Heard about Linkman over at the agency bein' murdered?" Burke asked innocently, watching Lassiter. The nod in reply was curt and indifferent.

"Shot," Burke murmured. "Funny thing." He smoked a while in silence, then said mildly:

"You rode that horse lately, Jim?"

Lassiter shook his head. "He's no blamed good. He's been runnin' loose since winter. Still carryin' most of his winter coat." He looked up at Burke. "Why?"

"That there horse was tracked from Linkman's place out to somewhere in the reservation, where he throwed a shoe. Whoever rode him picked up a Ute pony and switched

saddles and let that horse go. The fella that shot Linkman, I mean. He's the one that left the horse there."

Lassiter removed the cigarette from his mouth and turned his head toward Burke and said, "Who said so?"

Burke gestured to Pete. "Welch here is one of Ross Nance's deputies over in Seven Troughs. He'll tell you what he told me."

Lassiter gave Pete a searching glance, which Pete did not see, because he was lazily sifting sand through his fingers. He began to talk.

"This wasn't any of Nance's business. He figured it belonged to the army, and they're sendin' a man up to work on it. But there's always a bunch of punchers loose that aim to solve the thing in two hours. It was a GW puncher and a couple of Utes that picked up the pony. They found the shoe he lost, and then they found the pony and brought him to Nance."

"Why Nance?" Lassiter asked. "He don't have any say-so over the Ute Reservation. And the GW ain't even in Seven Troughs country. It's fifty miles off on the other side of Rafts."

"You got me there," Pete murmured. "Nance didn't aim to do anything about it. He told this puncher to take it up with the army. But that was before this other thing happened. After that, he figured whether it was any business of his or not, Sheriff Burke ought to know."

"What other thing?" Lassiter said.

Pete glanced at Burke, and Burke nodded. Pete said to Lassiter, then, "Understand, I'm just repeatin' what was told to Nance."

"What?"

"Well, a day or so after Linkman was killed, a couple of Utes drifted

into the agency. They'd been out roundin' up some horses, and they hadn't heard about Linkman's murder. Hadn't heard about this black gelding, either. When they found out about it, they remembered that they come across a white man on the reservation a day or so back. He didn't stop, and he didn't speak, but they thought they recognized the horse he was ridin'. It was a Ute horse."

"What about him?" Lassiter asked impatiently.

"The description they gave," Pete said quietly, "run like this: Middle age, not heavy and not tall, just medium. He had a corn-silk mustache, they said—pretty full and sort of straw-colored."

Lassiter's cigarette had gone out. He dropped it now and looked steadily at Burke. "That pretty well fits me, don't it?"

Burke nodded. "Seemed so to me, Jim. When Welch give me the description, it just naturally tied in with the brand on that horse there."

LASSITER put his elbows on his knees and looked off across the stretch of pasture in front of the house. "Happens I was here most of the last two weeks. Cook could prove that."

"I don't doubt it," Burke murmured. "Call him out, will you?"

The cook answered Lassiter's yell, and he testified that Lassiter had taken most of his meals at the ranch house for the past two weeks—ever since Lassiter and one of his men had come back from cleaning out water holes and springs after the winter.

When the cook was gone, Burke didn't say anything immediately. It was obvious to them all that if Lassiter had wanted to rig up a story, he could have warned the cook to say just what he had.

Presently, Lassiter said: "Those two Utes that claimed they saw me. They came in alone to tell Nance?"

Pete frowned as Lassiter turned to look at him. "No," Pete said slowly, "I don't think they did. I wasn't there when they come, but I recall Nance sayin' a man brought them."

"Remember his name?"

Again Pete frowned with the effort of memory. "Not exactly. Man by the name of Magersfield or Majorsfield or Agersfield or something like that."

"Manderfield—Ames Manderfield," Lassiter prompted.

"That's the name," Pete murmured.

"A GW rider, wasn't he?"

"That's right. A GW rider."

Lassiter smiled narrowly. "Seems like the GW took a lot of interest in gettin' Linkman's murderer."

Pete looked thoughtful as he shuttled his gaze to Lassiter. "It does, don't it? I recall one of them GW riders sayin' his boss and Linkman were good friends."

"Warranrode, you mean."

"Yes. That would be the name."

No one spoke for a few moments. Burke said then: "I don't rightly know what to do about this, Jim. What do you think?"

"You're the sheriff," Lassiter said grimly.

"I know it. But it ain't any business of mine. Nance didn't call for an arrest. He just thought I ought to know about this pony. The army hasn't sent me word. I got no legal reason for holdin' you, especially on the say-so of a couple of Ute Indians."

"And the GW riders," Lassiter said dryly.

"And them. Still, if you was to dodge out after I'd gone, I'd look pretty silly, wouldn't I, when the

army sent word to bring you over? And they'll do it, you can bet."

Lassiter spat in the dust and wiped his mustache and did not even look at Burke.

"It strikes me, Jim, you're goin' to have to do some talkin' sometime soon," Burke went on.

Lassiter only nodded.

"You aim to do it?"

Lassiter said merely, "I'll tell the truth."

"Then why not go over and see Nance?" Burke suggested. "He'll likely be workin' with the man the army sends."

"The devil with the army," Lassiter said bitterly.

"All right. But it's goin' to look a lot better for you if you're right there to hear it all and put in your word. That is, unless you was the man that rode this black away from Linkman's. In that case, you're caught right now."

LASSITER stood up and walked over to the black and looked at him again. He came back and said to Pete, "I don't see no saddle marks on him."

"Neither do I," Pete said. "I never did. But he likely worked them off rollin'."

Lassiter said, "That horse could have been picked up on my range any time this winter and I'd never 'a' missed him."

"Sure," Pete said.

Lassiter looked at him speculatively. "All right. I'll go," he said grimly. "I can't see through this thing, or around it, but I can smell it—and it don't smell so good."

Pete didn't comment. Lassiter stamped into the house. Burke shifted his position so he could watch the door, and he lifted his holster to his lap.

"That all right with you and

Nance?" he asked Pete, and Pete nodded.

"Mind, I don't know this Lassiter," Burke went on. "He might be a hard case for all I know. He might even wait till he gets out with you and then shoot you in the back."

"I'll take a chance," Pete murmured, and he smiled, although not at what Sheriff Burke thought.

Lassiter came out with his bed roll and a sack of grub, and saddled his horse. They mounted, and Burke, always a cautious man, suggested to Lassiter that he take the lead rope of the black gelding, which would have to be taken to Seven Troughs for evidence.

Burke rode west with them until the road to Wheeler turned south, and then Pete and Lassiter rode on together.

Lassiter was a taciturn man, and kept his silence most of the afternoon. At dusk, when they made camp at a spring deep in the Lowenweep breaks, Pete took the horses to stake out while Lassiter made the fire and supper.

After they were finished, Pete sat on his blankets and smoked. Lassiter stared moodily at the fire, frowning.

Presently, Lassiter said: "This GW rider, the one that found the black out on the reservation. What was his name?"

"Ames Manderfield."

Lassiter looked up sharply. "You never said that this afternoon."

"You never asked."

Lassiter had not ceased looking at Pete. He contemplated him now with a mixture of suspicion and surliness. "You know," he said finally, "I've got an idea you knew this Ames Manderfield all the time."

Pete said nothing. He rose and stretched and then put a hand on his

gun and pulled it out and pointed it at Lassiter.

"Know him?" he said softly. "I work for him. I work for Warranrode, too—but Warranrode never said it would be this easy." He added, "Put your hands up."

Slowly, Lassiter rose, and even more slowly raised his hands. He said quietly, "What is this?"

"Murder," Pete answered. "At least, those were Warranrode's orders."

CHAPTER XV.

RAIDS AND REPRISALS.

THE Anchor riders kept to the shoulder of the slope, riding the shadows beneath the deep timber in single file. Below them and far off, they caught an occasional wink of a light in Miles Les-ton's place.

Blake, who was riding ahead, pulled up now and said to Ben Mellish, "Can we take to the road?"

"Go ahead," Ben said grimly. "Nance won't have to do any guessing, anyway."

The dozen riders came out of the timber now to bunch on the road, Mellish at their head, and they walked their horses around the bend that gave them a clean view of the light in Swan Ullman's place on the other side of the high valley.

"He keep any dogs?" Blake asked.

"No. What if he does?"

They rode quietly into the yard, and as they neared the house, Swan came to the door, the lamp behind him outlining him.

"That you, Ed?" he asked mildly.

Ben Mellish did not answer immediately. He rode up close to the house, and his men followed him.

"It's Mellish, Swan," Ben said. "We've come to take over."

Swan stood motionless a second, and then his hand moved to pick up

the rifle beside the door. He said quietly to his wife inside, "You stay there." He stepped over the sill, carrying the rifle, and walked over to the spot from which Ben Mellish's voice had come.

"You're through in this basin, Ben," Swan said. "Even a man with as little sense as you got can see that. Even Nance has dropped you."

Ben didn't say anything.

"There was a time—and not long back—when you pretty much had your way with us. But don't try to take it now. You make one bad move and you'll kick up the kind of trouble you ain't lookin' for." Swan paused and waited for Ben to answer, but only the sound of the stomping of horses around him and the jingle of their bridle chains came to him. He added, "Now vamoose."

Turning, he walked toward the house, back to the horsemen.

Ben Mellish said, "All right, Blake."

Swan caught the sound of the voice. He paused, one foot on the sill, and half turned, to face the flat hammering of five gunshots. Dropping his rifle, he spread both hands wide to catch the door jambs, then turned and lunged a step into the house and pitched to his knees. His wife's scream rang out into the night even as he fell.

Blake dismounted and walked through the door, casually holstering his gun. Mrs. Ullman, her face twisted with terror, held a heavy Colt in her hand, and as Blake entered, she blazed away at him. Blake lunged for her and wrenched the gun out of her hand, and, in spite of her fighting and clawing and kicking and sobbing, dragged her by an arm out into the night, where one of the riders held her.

Then Blake returned with another

rider, and they proceeded to stack up the mean furniture in the middle of the floor. All except the table, for they laid Swan Ullman on that. There were two kerosene lamps burning against the night, one in a wall bracket, the other on the table. Blake knocked the chimneys off them, blew them out, and smashed one on the pile of furniture. The other he bothered to unscrew and poured the contents over Swan Ullman's shirt and pants.

AFTER he had touched a match to the furniture, he came out. Mrs. Ullman sat on the hard-packed dirt, sobbing hysterically, and Blake stood by her, his hard face musing, until the flames caught and the heat became unbearable so close. She was moved away from it then. Other riders had freed the stock and fired the sheds.

Ben Mellish watched the fire take hold of the dry cabin logs until its light turned the small pocket of valley into day. Then he moved his horse over to Mrs. Ullman and reined up beside her.

"Tell the rest of Swan's nester friends how things are now," he said. Mrs. Ullman looked up at him, and in her eyes was all the unforgiving hate of a hard woman's soul. Ben laughed complacently, and reined his horse away, and his riders dropped in behind him. Once clear of the valley, they took to the timber again, this time cutting off toward Ed Briedehoff's.

When they came to Ed's place, it was dark, and Ben rode cautiously up to the house and listened, hearing only quiet night sounds in the gray dark.

"Ed!" he said, and there was no answer. He called to Blake, "All right," and the Anchor crew moved into the yard. Blake and another

rider dismounted and walked up to the porch. Off up the slope, a rifle cracked sharply, and the man beside Blake grunted and tripped and fell. Then, from this same place, another and louder rifle joined the first.

Ben Mellish said sharply to Blake, "Get in there!" and he wheeled his horse toward the slope. "Come on!" he commanded the three remaining men, who were returning the fire now. The horse closest to Ben went down, the rider cursing wildly above the steady hammering of the two rifles up the slope. Contemptuous of the rifle fire, Ben yelled to his other two men, "Curse you, come on!" It was his bold, hard voice, in seeming disregard of the shooting, that turned the men, and they spurred over to him and past him and raced up the slope into the brush, shooting blindly into the night.

A riderless horse milled between them, sawing across their paths in terror, until the night was filled with Ben's snarling curses. There was no system; they fought their horses up the slope to the spot from which the shots had come. When they reached the place, they beat the brush back and forth, stopping to listen and to call to each other, but the riflemen had left.

Ben whistled them down to the shack. Check-up revealed another man missing besides the one who had gone down at the first shot.

Blake, who had leaned on a pillar of the porch during all this, lounged erect now and glanced negligently at the body at his feet.

"Touch the place off, and give us some light," Ben said darkly.

Blake followed the same procedure as at Ullman's. When the flames had crawled through the door and windows, Ben sent his two men to

catch up the two loose horses and to hunt for the remaining body. They discovered the body just over the shoulder of the hill, and brought it back.

It was with murky anger in his eyes that Ben Mellish regarded the two dead men at his feet. No pity roused it, for these men could be bought at a hundred a month, and they knew the risk; it was a sullen rage that Ed Briedehoff and the other rifleman had successfully defied him. He touched the boot of one with his own foot and then looked up at Blake,

"Load them on their ponies. We'll take them back."

Blake detailed the other to this job with a quiet word. These two were silent now, a little sobered by what they had just witnessed, a little shamed by Ben Mellish's disregard of real danger.

Ben walked over to the dead horse, and Blake trailed him. In that uncertain light, Ben drew out his pocket knife and knelt and cut out from the horse's hip the square of hide which held the brand. Then he gave it to Blake, saying, "Throw that in the fire."

Blake took it. "I thought this was in the open, now."

"There's always Nance," Ben said harshly. "But he can't try a man without a body to prove a murder. And he can't prove a burning on us without evidence to show in court we did it."

Blake thought this over a moment, ruminating on the piece of wet hide he had in his hand. "What would you call Ullman's wife?" he said. "What would you call those two up on the slope?"

"Three people's word against myself and three of my own riders," Ben said briefly. "Get on."

STEVE and Ed, from the height of the bare ridge beyond Ed's place, watched the shack go up in flames. The figures of the men clotted around the shack were small, but plain, and Ed watched them hunt for the body and saw Ben Mellish walk over to the dead horse and kneel by it.

He said quietly, "You got any shells left?"

"Rifle? No."

"Forty-five?"

"It's too far."

"Have you?"

"No."

Ed sighed. "It can wait," he said, and Steve said nothing. It came to him how thoroughly right Pete had been in cursing him for a quitter. There would be no quitting now, and one look at Ed Briedehoff's face was enough to prove it.

Ed said meagerly, "We can't leave Swan's woman over there."

"Maybe Mellish let Swan go."

"There was five shots," Ed said briefly, conclusively. He put his horse up the ridge, and they traveled that same trail that Ed and Pete had taken before.

The shack was a heap of still glowing coals. Crossing the valley, Ed swerved for a freed horse that stood looking at the fire, and they took this horse with them.

Mrs. Ullman was still sitting on the ground, her sobs hard and tight and endless. She saw Ed and Steve without recognizing them, and Ed lifted her to her feet. "Where is Swan?" he asked, and she pointed to the hot coals.

"You better come along," Ed said gently. "The rest of it is for us to do."

He took his rope and fashioned a hackamore for the loose mare, and the three of them took the road down to Leston's. Mrs. Ullman

never stopped crying. She made no effort to guide her horse, so that Ed, riding up beside her, put a hand on her horse's bridle and rode that way.

At Leston's, Miles's wife took Mrs. Ullman into the house, and Ed briefly told Miles what had happened. Miles wanted to ride in to Seven Troughs then, but Ed would not hear of it, and soon he and Steve left.

It was a wearing ride for Steve, who felt himself tired and yet savagely primed for a trouble that could not be fought now. Ed rode with the dogged deliberation of a range-bred man who knows the time is coming, and who has the patience to wait for it. He did not hurry to Seven Troughs, and neither did he loiter. They got in at dawn, stabled their horses, and ate a leisurely breakfast in a silence so deep that, to an observer, they would have appeared strangers.

Nance went in to his office just as they were finishing their after-breakfast cigarettes, and Ed rose without a word to Steve and crossed to the office.

Nance's amiable reserved greeting died on his lips as he saw them.

"Swan got it," Ed said briefly. "They burned him out, too. They burned me out likewise."

"Ben?"

"Who else?"

Nance slid down in his chair and pulled out a drawer and absently shut it, face musing.

ED said: "Nance, maybe I know how you feel about this, but it's no time to care much. I'm just tellin' you. To-day I make the rounds of these men who won't belong to our association—our little bunch of penny-ante wise men. If I have any luck with them, Ben Mellish will lose half his riders within

a week. He'll lose most of his cattle. His place will be burned, and he'll be dead. And if you aim to stop me, I'll include you in on our Mutual Bushwhack Society, too. What about it?"

"Get some sleep," Nance said mildly.

Ed replied, "That's an idea, too." He turned to Steve, smiling sourly. "Did I ever claim our friend Pete was a rash man? If I did, I was wrong, but maybe it ain't too late to fix that. I'm goin' to get some sleep over at the Legal Tender. Are you?"

"No."

"Ed, you sleep till I get back from the Anchor. I'll know better what to do, then. So will you," Nance said.

"I already know," Ed said, and left. Steve took the only other chair and slumped into it.

Nance, watching him, said, "I wouldn't make a move for a while yet."

Steve stood up and walked to the door. "Don't talk to me," he said. "Ed spoke his piece for me, too."

At the Legal Tender, Steve saw Ed stretched out on the lone pool table in the rear, dead to the world. The bartender gave Steve his whisky, but it didn't do any good. He was weary, but sleep was out of the question. Cuddling the glass in his half-clenched palm, Steve thought bitterly of his parting with Pete.

If only Pete had waited for Steve to tell him he was sorry, and that he had spoken in a moment of discouragement! But he hadn't, and right now, wherever Pete was, he was thinking of Steve as a quitter. It didn't matter that, after Pete had left, Steve had shamed and bullied and cajoled Ed Briedehoff and Miles Leston into taking the offensive

again, and into trying again to round up these north-basin ranchers on the morrow for a raiding party. It had come too late; while they were waiting for to-morrow, Ben Mellish had struck. Pete would always think Ben Mellish had crowded them into it, and that they had lacked both the courage and foresight—and, above all, the leadership—to take things in their own hands.

NANCE left town and rode straight to the Anchor. He had ample time to consider what he would do, so that when he rode into the Anchor yard and dismounted before the bunk house, under the eyes of Blake and Ben Mellish and a half dozen riders squatted in the shade of the building, he didn't waste time.

"Better come along and face it now, Ben," Nance said, walking over to him. Ben and Blake lounged in the wide door. Ben's face wore an expression of heavy, obvious surprise, and he looked briefly at Blake, as if asking information.

"Come along where?" he said.

"Town. It'll save the county money and me the trouble of deputizin' the town to come up and take you."

Ben whistled. "Wait a minute," he demanded. "What charges? What is this?"

Nance faced him, and he was standing on the ground so that he had to tilt his head back to see the face of Ben, who was standing on the log sill. It made him feel foolish, a little silly, and considerably at a disadvantage.

But he said stubbornly: "Killin' Swan Ullman and burnin' Briedehoff out. I haven't checked up on this yet, but I've got eyewitnesses."

Ben smiled broadly. "Let's get to the proof. What is it?"

"Two witnesses."

"It won't do," Ben said. "I was here all night, and I've got a dozen men to prove it."

"I'll give them that chance at the hearing. Come along."

Blake moved slightly in the doorway. His face was still swollen and marked with the blows Pete had given him, and his eyes, almost puffed shut, were vicious and calculating.

Ben said: "And let that bunch of nesters breed a lynch mob? What kind of a fool do I look like, Nance?"

"You won't come, then?"

"That seems to be the general idea, sheriff."

"Then I'll have to take you,"

Nance muttered, starting to raise his hand to his gun.

Blake, smiling evilly, kicked out savagely with his booted foot, and the blow caught Nance along the shelf of his jaw, sending him over backward into the dust. Blake, gun still in holster, walked over to him and flipped out Nance's gun and stood there while Nance, groaning with the pain, rested on all fours for a moment, then rose unsteadily to his feet. He heard a man laugh.

"Stay away, sheriff," Blake growled.

Nance mounted and rode off without another word. Once out of sight of the house, he felt his jaw gingerly, his face gray, the light of murder in his eyes. He knew that bluff about deputizing the town would never work. A sheriff stayed in office only on the sufferance of the people who put him there, and townsmen would not join a fight when they could remain neutral. And it was out of the question for him to deputize the north-basin ranchers. As for picking up a crew of anonymous ranch

hands, that would be folly, since no one willingly commits suicide.

Still, bluff or no bluff, Nance hadn't expected to be kicked like a dog. Any man deserved the honor of being fought with a gun. Somewhere in the back of his mind, Sheriff Ross Nance filed a pledge to his Maker: Blake would never leave this county alive.

At a little past four in the afternoon, Ben named off eight of his riders, who saddled up and then gathered beside the bunk house while Ben gave his instructions to Blake. Blake was to stay there, with four men, the cook and horse wrangler, in case Nance really did bring his posse, which was a remote possibility. Ben and the others would take up their jobs where they had left off last night, and he and his eight riders filed out and took the west road.

After full dark, six men, led by Ed Briedehoff and Steve, moved down off the ridge from which they had been watching the Anchor since late afternoon, and dismounted in a little gut at the edge of the timber, well behind the ranch.

They clustered about Ed, whose squat and burly figure contrasted with Steve's gangling form.

"By my count, there's six left, maybe more," Ed said. Nobody said anything, because they had all counted along with Ed. But they waited to hear him out. "By the law books," Ed went on doggedly, "this will be murder. Does any one want to back out now?"

There were no takers. "If any of you gag at this," Ed said in parting, "just remember Swan."

They already had their directions, and split into two groups of four. Ed and Steve were in the same group, and they struck off past the

cinders of the hay sheds toward the house. There was still a faint flavor of raw smoke in the air. Gaining the corrals, Ed walked out beyond them to look at the bunk house. One guard lounged in the doorway. Across the hard-packed dirt, his rough voice reached out to Ed, who knew this guard was more interested in the inside of the bunk house than what might happen on the outside.

Ed came back and said: "Just one. He's yarnin', and in the face of that lamplight he couldn't see ten feet. If we don't kick up a racket, we can move over where we want."

He led off then. Slowly, noiselessly, out of the darkness of the corral, he led the others. The guard looked out into the night only once and saw nothing and turned his attention back to the company of his fellows. The next time he looked, the four of them were hidden from his sight by the corner of the bunk house.

A square of light lay aslant from the window in the end of the shack. It threw into relief a patch of ragged weeds, but on either side of it the darkness was profound, and it was toward this square that Ed worked his way.

Standing on the far edge of it, he could see into the room. Two men lounged at the long center table. On the far end, Blake was engaged in a morose and silent game of solitaire. The other voices came from the bunks. Once a man moved up to look over Blake's shoulder and said something, which Blake did not even seem to hear.

Ed made a motion, and Cass Ford and Steve moved past him to the front corner of the shack. Abel Tohill, Cass's single rider, took the other side of the square and moved up to the wall of the shack.

Ed waited until he knew he had allowed enough time for Leston and the others to reach the rear window of the bunk house.

THEN Ed raised his rifle to his shoulder, and against that lighted square of the room his sights were easily visible. He exhaled his breath slowly and then swung his sights in line, and when they settled, rock-steady, on Blake's temple, he fired.

Blake went out of sight. Cass and Steve rounded the corner in time to cut down on the guard, who was half erect in the door now. Ed and Abel, at either side of the window, were pumping shots into the room. The fire of Miles at the rear window joined in before one of Blake's men had the sense to shoot out the light. It was still, then, and there was a thin tortured whisper in the room. Suddenly, a flame appeared, and a tangle of blazing tumbleweeds was tossed through Miles's window, again illuminating the room.

By this light, Ed shot a man under the table, and then, as rifle was added to rifle at the back window, slugs hunted out every corner of the bunk house, every bunk where anything moved, every hidden cranny of this room that was lighted for so much as a second.

When the fire died, there was again silence, and Ed pulled his rifle from the window with a rough clatter and said loudly, "Let's look."

He rounded the corner, and Steve and Cass came out of the night to join him. Not waiting for Miles and his men, Ed struck a match on the doorframe and stepped over two bodies into the room. The match died, and he groped on the long table for the lamp, the chimney of which was shattered. By its weav-

ing and uncertain light, they hunted seven men here, three shrinking, even in death, into the shelter of the bunks. Blake lay at ease on his face. One lay under the table, gun in hand. One more was sprawled across the body of the guard.

"Get that wall lamp," Ed said briefly. It had been unlighted. Both lamps were smashed on the floor, and Ed touched a match to the oily boards. Then he followed the others outside.

Patiently, but not looking at each other, they waited for the first flame. When the blaze had started to lick out of the window, Ed said, "Now for the house."

They had not walked fifteen yards toward the house when a rifle shot kicked up dust at their feet. It came from a window in the second story of the main building, and Ed, paused, watching the window while the flame pushed back the darkness, presently said, "That was a woman."

The next shot, a little closer, warned them to scatter, and they made for the shelter of the corrals.

Steve turned to Ed and said savagely: "I won't help burn a woman alive, Ed! I won't even let you do it!"

"That house is goin' to be burned," Ed said grimly.

"Then fire one of the wings and give her a chance to get out."

Ed thought a minute and said, "All right." He disappeared into the dark of the corrals. Presently, at the end of one of the wings, they saw a flame start, idle a while, then, by the time Ed returned, lazily rise into a log-fed fire. In a few moments, when it had enough headway to resist any attempt at putting it out, they turned away to their horses.

SARAH, the fat Ute cook, watched them go and then came down and observed the fire. At the corral, she caught the first horse that would come to her, saddled it, and rode over to the flaming wing. Her dark face was unreadable as she waited until the roof caved in at the far end of the wing. Then she went over and looped her rope around the end of a log against the main building, as yet untouched by the flames.

Mounting the pony, she set him into the pull, and the log, free of the weight of the roof, came out abruptly, letting the others pile down on it. Its one end in flames, she dragged it off away from the house and went back for another. In half an hour, she had the logs of this room strewn in a neat pile away from the house, where they could harmlessly burn themselves out. She turned the horse loose then, her duty done, and went into the main house. The fire at the bunk house did not interest her, for these men were dead and had deserved their death.

And thus the Seven Troughs war swung into full stride.

That night, Ben Mellish burned four places, and not until he returned home did he think it strange that he had met with no resistance. Then he understood. Sarah, after telling him of the raid, made breakfast for the men, and it was served on the porch. Ben ate with his eight men, and his anger was smoldering and savage.

Halfway through the meal, one of the men coughed and pitched forward upon his plate as the faint slap of a gunshot came through the still morning air. The men scrambled wildly for the door to the house. Balefully, Ben regarded the edge of timber from which the shot had come; then he, too, went inside.

After breakfast was finished and the men scattered to sleep, Ben saw two of them slip out and get their horses and ride off. He did not attempt to stop them. At noon, one of his line riders who had been helping hold the Anchor herds far up in the mountains rode into the place with his hands wrapped across his middle and had to be helped off his horse. Before he fainted, he told Ben that two of his riders were ambushed, the herd stampeded.

In late afternoon, Ben saw a column of smoke rising over the pines far, far up the slope. He knew this would be the Burnt Creek line shack.

He roused three of his riders, who were sleeping on the floor of the main room, and told them to saddle up.

"Cut for their sign, and when you find it, stick to it. And when you find them, shoot them," he ordered. He watched them saddle up and take the trail up the slope; then he went over and looked again at the ashes of the bunk house. This couldn't go on, he thought darkly; a fight can't be won unless you carry it to the other fellow. To-night, he would take the rest of his men and cut a swath in this basin that would settle this. He would take his fight to town; he would hire a hundred men if he had to.

Over at the corral, he climbed the poles and sat atop it sunk in bitter thought. Ames Manderfield had not shown up yet, and there had been no word from him. It began to look as if what Pete Yard had said was true. Warranrode had withdrawn his help. It seemed that——

Ben raised his head, hearing a scattering of gunfire. He listened, trying to locate it. It came from up the slope. Maybe his boys had surprised the raiders. Climbing off the corral poles, he walked toward the

house. Halfway there, he turned sharply to listen to the sound of running horses riding down the faint upland breeze. In another moment two ponies broke from the timber and trotted into the yard, their saddles empty. They were the horses belonging to two of the three riders he had sent up the slope, not ten minutes ago.

That evening, as Ben lighted the big lamp and held it high to put in a bracket on the wall of the big room, it was shot out of his hand. The shot came through one of the rear windows. He stood there in the darkness, breathing hard, listening to the men crawl for shelter; and, for the first time, it came to him that he had started something that was now out of hand.

The men munched biscuits in a dark house, and Ben sat in a deep chair, taking stock. His hands—he had four now—moved across the windows, not wanting to go outside, expecting more shots, which might come at any time. And Ben, watching them contemptuously, began to understand the shape of defeat.

CHAPTER XVI.

LISSITER'S STORY.

IT is not pleasant to watch fear take hold of a man, and Pete, over leveled gun, waited for it to show in Lassiter's face. But it didn't. Lassiter calmly raised his hands, and Pete stepped around the fire and took his gun.

Lassiter said tentatively, "You're doin' this for money?"

"Five hundred dollars."

Lassiter regarded him with speculative contempt, his glance falling to the guns and rising to Pete again. "The gov'ment is offerin' fifteen hundred for Linkman's killer."

"When this is over, I'll get that, too," Pete murmured. "You're it."

Lassiter shook his head slowly, not wanting to look at the guns now. "Maybe so. But if you collect it off me, you'll split it three ways. You, Nance, and Burke."

Pete nosed up his guns. "You've talked enough."

"I can tell you the murderer," Lassiter said, and added with biting contempt: "As long as you're in it for money, get all you can. This won't be a split."

"Don't crawl."

"I can name you the man. It isn't me."

Pete pretended to consider this, and Lassiter saw his careful scowl. Quickly, Lassiter said: "I'm goin' to put my hands down and then sit down. You just listen." He sat down, as Pete carefully backed around to the side of him and squatted on his haunches.

Lassiter began to speak, then, in a measured, dry voice, his eyes shutting keenly between Pete's face and the two leveled guns.

"You can see for yourself, from what you've told me, that Senator Warranrode is aimin' to hang this bushwhack on me. His riders found my horse; his riders brought in the two Utes who saw me. And he bribed you to get me off alone and put a bullet through my back. Is that all correct?"

Pete didn't answer, didn't move.

"Answer this then. Why would Warranrode, a rich and respected man, want to get me out of the way?"

"I never even wondered," Pete answered coldly.

"Because I have somethin' on him, wouldn't you say?"

Pete shook his head slowly, and allowed himself a cynical smile. "No man who has anything on a man

as rich as Warranrode, is goin' to stay as poor as you are."

"How do you know I'm poor?" Lassiter countered.

"I saw your place."

"You didn't see my bank account," Lassiter said dryly. "It's well up in five figures. It's all banked in Cheyenne."

"What are you gettin' at?" Pete demanded impatiently. "Your money won't do you any good now."

"I'm tryin' to tell you I've been workin' for Warranrode, that he's paid me this money, and that he's promised me more."

Pete said, with studied obtuseness: "What of it? So am I. What are you gettin' at?"

"I'm provin' to you that I've worked on a dirty job for Warranrode, and when you hear what the dirty job is, you'll have your murderer and you can collect your reward."

"Who is it? Warranrode?" Pete demanded, showing some interest now.

LASSITER said patiently, as if he were addressing a child: "I want you to understand this. If you kill me, you'll collect your money from Warranrode and maybe a third of the reward money. If you turn in the real murderer, you'll collect more. You understand that?"

Pete cursed him for a fool in calculated, measured oaths. Lassiter heard him out, then raised his hand, bidding for silence.

"Sure, I'm a danged fool. But just listen. A year ago I sold my place, the Chevron, to Warranrode, for thirty thousand dollars—twice what it was worth. He paid me another ten thousand to stay on the place and pretend it was mine."

Pete looked as if he didn't believe it.

Lassiter shifted to another tack. "You must have heard about the Ute Reservation bein' cut down, didn't you? About part of it comin' up for public sale?"

"I heard it."

"The part that is comin' up for public sale ain't ten miles from here. Every foot of it joins Chevron range."

"What of it?"

"I've got instructions to bid on it at public sale—to bid and take half of it, and let Fonso Schumacher, up north, bid against me and get the other half. And both of us are buyin' it for Warranrode."

Pete said: "You lie. It was only decided a week ago, and if they published what part was comin' up for sale, it hadn't reached Seven Troughs when I left."

Lassiter smiled in quiet triumph. "It was decided months ago—decided between Warranrode and Major Linkman, the Ute agent. Linkman drove the Utes into lettin' go that piece. And lucky for him it was the most useless piece on their range."

Pete felt excitement crawl through him, but he stared at Lassiter with remote and hard suspicion. Then he said slowly: "Old man, you're lyin'. It makes a good story—but it happens I've been over that piece of the reservation. You couldn't run fifteen hundred head of cattle on the whole thing, and to Warranrode, fifteen hundred head isn't worth the drive to Wheeler."

"Who said anything about cattle?" Lassiter asked slowly. "There's coal there—hundreds of thousands of tons of it, layin' under the surface for the man that's got eyes to see it."

Pete took a tight and savage grip on his guns to steady them, and the breath caught in his chest. He rose,

for the blood in him seemed racing too fast for stillness. But he said nothing.

"Linkman knew it, and never reported it," Lassiter went on. "He's the one that come to Warranrode with the scheme to get it out of government hands, and Warranrode pulled the necessary strings in Washington. Him and Linkman were to split it."

Pete said skeptically, "So what?"

"So Warranrode had Linkman murdered."

"The proof."

AND now Lassiter allowed himself a smile. "Two days before the Ute chiefs met, Linkman rode over to my place. He wanted me to double-cross Warranrode. His idea was that, when I bid and got half the land, I was to deed him my half for one hundred thousand dollars cash."

Pete licked his lips. "And you did it?"

"I told him I would. But when he was gone, I rode over to Warranrode and told him about Linkman's proposition." He paused. "Warranrode killed him. Who else could?" He hesitated, watching belief take hold in Pete's face, for it was a belief that Pete could not hide. Here, beyond the faintest doubt, was the whole story, enough to hang Warranrode.

Lassiter was saying: "Warranrode is panicked. Before Linkman told me the whole story, I couldn't have hurt Warranrode. Now I can." His voice was merciless. "And if you'll wait, I will."

Pete rose and walked around the fire, his guns hanging at his sides.

Lassiter murmured: "The whole reward is yours. I won't claim a cent. Do you believe me?"

Pete looked up swiftly. "Will you

tell that to an army man? And tell him the reward money is mine?"

Lassiter nodded.

Pete pulled out a handkerchief and wiped the sweat from his face. He took the rope from his saddle, because if he was working he could hide his trembling excitement from Lassiter. Later, when Lassiter lay trussed by the fire, and Pete went out to catch up the horses, he settled himself into the old calm again, so that when he returned with the horses, his eyes showed Lassiter only the greed he pretended.

With Lassiter's legs roped under the belly of his horse, Pete scattered the coals of the fire and they rode off toward the reservation.

They rode all that night and far into the next day, so that it was late afternoon when they swung through the Ute camp for the dogs to bark at and the children to stare at. Pete sat his saddle heavily, aware that in these next few minutes he would have to have all his wits about him, and yet weariness rode him with an iron hand. He had crowded his luck this far, played his bluff with a hard shrewdness, but it was not finished yet.

He would have to find the investigating officer sent by the army, and convince him that, before any questions were asked of Lassiter, this weary and disillusioned man must be allowed to talk and to talk freely. On that depended his whole scheme, for once Lassiter learned through being questioned that no black horse had been found, that he was not even suspected, that Pete had played a bitter hoax on him, he would not talk. And without his talk, Pete knew his case would be lost.

There were two cavalry regulars lounging under the wooden awning of the trader's store as they passed, and Pete's hopes rose, for it indicated

that he had guessed rightly in thinking the army investigator would have arrived by now.

HE glanced obliquely at Lassiter, who was as weary as himself. A look of apathy was clouding his eyes, and he regarded the army men with no surprise, only an indifference that heartened Pete.

They rode on up to the agency residence, and Pete saw a cluster of Utes squatting in the shade of the office. Two soldiers stood at ease on either side of the open doorway.

Pete swung off at the hitch rack and took Lassiter's reins and tied his pony, while the soldiers observed him with awakening curiosity. Saddle-stiff and weary, he walked up to them, and one observed: "Can't go in there, fella. Colonel Knight's at work."

Pete said, "Tell him I've got some information about the murder of Linkman."

The soldier looked dubious and jerked his head toward Lassiter. "I suppose that's the puncher that shot him."

"See what the colonel thinks," Pete answered. The soldier looked hard at him and then went inside. Pete could hear him talking to another man, and soon he returned and said, "He'll see you."

Pete entered the small room to find a man in army blue seated in the lone easy-chair beside a desk, at which another army man sat taking notes. Two Utes, one an interpreter, stood before the colonel, and now he dismissed them and regarded Pete.

Pete's first impression of Colonel Knight was that of a sensible and fair man, harassed by fatigue and frustration. He was heavy, partially bald, with a sensitive, tired face. He

said courteously, "What is it, my man?"

Pete said, "You know how to listen, colonel?"

Colonel Knight removed the cigar from his mouth and stared at Pete, frowning. Hours of examining most of the Ute Indians here had not improved his temper; but, on the other hand, he was a man of some humor, and to be asked such a question appealed to his sense of irony, for he had done nothing but listen for three days.

"I do," he said, still courteously, and added with a touch of faint sarcasm that was relieved by a smile: "I have practically memorized the Ute language by listening to it. Does this concern Major Linkman's death?"

"It does. I want another favor besides."

"What is that?"

Pete indicated the man at the desk. "Is he your secretary?"

"Adjutant."

"Tell him to get a clean sheet and take this down. I'm bringin' a man in here. Don't ask him his name. Don't ask him a question until he's through talkin'. Just listen—and write down what he says. Will you do it?"

The colonel leaned forward said: "Certainly. What man?"

"Shall I get him?"

"By all means."

Pete went out and untied Lassiter and followed him into the room. Pete said: "Lassiter, this is Colonel Knight. Take a chair and tell him what you told me."

Colonel Knight offered Lassiter his own chair, which was accepted; and he shot a questioning glance at Pete, which Pete ignored.

"Start from the beginning, when you sold your place," Pete said.

IN a flat monotone, Lassiter launched into his story. It was complete, and he outlined enough of it for Colonel Knight to understand the background. At the tenth mention of Senator Warranrode, Knight looked over at Pete, who shook his head faintly. Starting with the purchase of the Chevron, Lassiter progressed to the murder, to Pete's call, to Pete's threat, to the confession of Linkman's visit to him, and to the conclusions which he voiced very simply.

"There's only one man that could have killed Linkman, colonel. That man is Warranrode. As for that black horse that was stolen from my range and left as evidence against me, I leave it to you to figure out who planted it, and who framed the evidence."

The adjutant had ceased writing, and now he sat back in his chair and massaged his pen hand. Colonel Knight, a look of frank amazement on his face, said: "Yes, that horse. What about him? You've mentioned that several times."

"That horse," Pete murmured, "was an idea of my own. I caught him up on Lassiter's range and used him to blackmail the story out of Lassiter."

Lassiter turned bleak eyes on Pete, and his face flushed. "You ain't a deputy? That horse—it—you never can—"

"Corporal!" the colonel called, and one of the soldiers stepped inside. "Both you men take this man into Mrs. Linkman's parlor and guard him."

Lassiter's protest was over, and he seemed to be more relieved that his secret was out than angry with Pete's method of learning it. He rose wearily and marched ahead of the escort. Colonel Knight did not even watch him go. He came over

and stood before Pete and said: "Who is he? Tell me how you got him. Tell me who you are."

Pete told him his side of it then, and in the telling he brought in the Seven Troughs war, Ben Mellish, Steve and his kidnaping—all of it, from his own earliest days with the GW through his bluff to Lassiter. And Colonel Knight kept his eyes on Pete's face, and the adjutant, wise man that he was, wrote swiftly and interminably. When Pete had finished, Colonel Knight sat down and stared out the open doorway. He put a cigar in his mouth and promptly forgot to light it. Several times he got ready to speak, and then didn't. Finally, he rose and stood in the doorway, and then turned to Pete.

"Yard, I don't think you realize what you've laid before me. Warranrode is a public figure, and—and I just can't believe it."

"I worked for him for three years, and I would have shot the man hinting at a story like this," Pete said.

"I want to be fair," Colonel Knight continued. "I'll have to check your record. I'll have to take into custody for questioning Lassiter's cook, who saw Linkman at the Chevron; also your Steve Trueblood and Schumacher. I'll have to get to a telegraph to wire Cheyenne and verify Lassiter's bank account. I'll have to question the Ute chiefs again. Every step I take will have to be checked and rechecked."

Pete rose and took Colonel Knight's arm and turned him around, pointing to the chair. "Sit down, colonel." Colonel Knight did. Pete faced him, stubbornly. "How long have you been in the West here, colonel?"

"Seven months."

"I've been here all my life," Pete said. "Let me tell you where you're

wrong. You send two men over to pick up that cook and Schumacher. Before your troopers have picked up Lassiter's cook, Schumacher will be dead. More than that, there's not one chance in five hundred that your cook will arrive here alive. There's even less chance that Jim Lassiter will live a week. There's no chance at all that Steve Trueblood will be allowed to live to tell you anything. As for myself, I would take to the brush and travel day and night to put seven ranges of mountains between me and Senator Warranrode." He paused, shook his head slowly. "You see, in the East, when a man like Warranrode is accused of this crime, he hires the best lawyers in the country. Here, a man sees to it that he isn't accused. That's the difference."

"You mean he'd kill all these men who could testify against him?"

"He would."

Colonel Knight looked hard at Pete. "Then what am I to do—assuming that what you say is true?"

"You don't have to assume it," Pete said. "Look what happened to Linkman."

"All right, but what am I to do?"

PETE said quickly: "There's a Ute subchief here in camp. His name is Stumbling Bear. He knows this country like you know the parts of a gun, and he is honest. If you've got a trooper here you can trust, and who isn't prejudiced against an Indian, take the uniform off him and tell him to obey every order Stumbling Bear gives him. Put Lassiter in the care of those two men and forget him, and when you need him to testify, he'll be brought in alive."

"But he'll be safe in jail!"

"Every jail has got a window," Pete said. "And no window is so

small a rifle bullet won't go through it."

Colonel Knight considered this with impassive face. "All right. What next?"

"Your commission gives you the authority to place under military arrest any one suspected of the murder of Major Linkman, or any one concerned with the murder, doesn't it?"

"In effect, yes."

Pete said calmly, "Go over and arrest Warranrode and hold him, and don't let a single man talk to him without an army order."

Knight looked up at him swiftly. "But the evidence!"

"The devil with evidence!" Pete said harshly. "Get the evidence after you've got him bottled and corked, or you'll never get it at all!"

Colonel Knight rose and paced the room. Suddenly, he stopped and said to Pete: "In other words, it's up to him to prove his innocence. It's not up to me to prove his guilt."

"That's pretty close."

"All American law is founded on the supposition that a man is innocent till proved guilty. It's his right."

"Does it say anything about the rights of a wolf?" Pete asked.

Knight frowned grimly. "Of course, you know I'd be broken—possibly cashiered—if this was a mistake."

"And you'd be made a major general if it wasn't."

Pete waited until Colonel Knight sat down again, and pressed his palms together and scowled at the floor. Pete knew the army habit of mind well enough to know that what he was suggesting was contrary to its way. But he also knew the army had a custom of rewarding men who

knew when to overstep their authority. And he thought he knew Knight.

He said quietly: "You took an oath once, colonel. And in livin' up to it, you've fought Kiowas and Comanches and Apaches. But you'll never have a chance to protect your people against a worse kind of savage than the kind Warranrode is."

Colonel Knight put both hands on the arms of his chair and rose, facing Pete.

"When my superior officer sent me on this job, he told me to be sure and do one thing: Look up Doctor Benbow, an old army-surgeon friend of his who was cashiered for drinking, but who was the wisest, most honest man he had ever known. I

looked up Doctor Benbow the night I got in on the Seven Troughs stage."

He smiled a little, now. "Do you know the only advice he gave me? It was to hunt down Pete Yard, and hire him, and once I hired him, to believe in him." He turned away. "I think I'll do it."

He drew up a chair beside his adjutant and motioned to it. "Sit down. Tell my adjutant the entire story—putting in the proof where you have it, and leaving it out where you haven't. When you've finished, we'll hunt up your Stumbling Bear and turn Lassiter over to him. And when that's done, I'll ride over to the GW—but not to collect that dinner Senator Warranrode invited me to."

To be concluded in next week's issue.

PREHISTORIC INDIANS

ACCORDING to archæological history, there lived in Nebraska the Ponca Indians, normally a mild community, tilling the soil and raising crops. Their enemy was the Omaha tribe, which, from time to time, invaded their domain and stirred up animosity. After one of these invasions by the other tribe, the Poncas rose up in righteous indignation and attacked the Omahas who lived south of them, capturing horses and some of their women.

Among the women taken was one who was considered very beautiful. The Omahas felt she was worth fighting for. They staged a battle against the Poncas some time later and doubtless were greatly surprised to find that the woman for whom they fought was battling by the side of her Ponca conqueror against her own tribesmen. The Poncas fought inside of a great fort, and it is this same fort that was recently excavated under the supervision of Doctor Earl H. Bell, of the University of Nebraska.

The fort contained a moat and cache pits. Fourteen skulls were recovered. Needless to say, the Poncas won that significant battle, and the woman who was the cause of it lived on peacefully with the tribe which had snatched her away from her home. Evidently she didn't like her relatives.

NOTICE—This magazine contains new stories only. No reprints are used.



COW HORSES

(THE SPANISH HORSE)

By CHARLES L. McNICHOLS

WHEN the famous Samuel L. Clemens, better known by his writing name, "Mark Twain," quit his job as a Mississippi steamboat pilot and began "roughing it" in the gold fields of California and Nevada, he decided to buy himself a horse. The trader said to him, "Mister, you are really getting something. That there horse is a genuine Mexican plug."

From the manner in which he records the words of the horse trader we gather that Mark Twain thought they were sarcastic, which shows he hadn't, up until then, learned a whole lot about the West, or, at least, not much about Western

horses. Actually, the trader was complimenting the animal. In the language of the American frontiersman, "Mexican" referred to anything Spanish, and his "Mexican plug" meant that the horse was what we now call a "Spanish horse," or a "native," or "cold blood." They were, and are, good saddle horses, and particularly good cow ponies.

Now we'll have to explain that the "native" is not the same horse as the mustang, although a lot of uninformed persons fail to distinguish between the two. There was a difference, originally, anyway. In these days, when both the mustang and the Spanish horse have degenerated considerably because of the

careless introduction of foreign blood, there is little to choose between some of them. But all true mustangs are the descendants of a bunch of wild horses that roamed the plains around the Red River. Their progenitors were Spanish horses, all right, having escaped from various exploring parties, but they had more of the blood of the common pack horse than of the aristocratic Spanish barb, and the mustang breed was modified a great deal by the fact that they roamed wild with the buffalo for more than a hundred years without any interference from man.

About 1650 the Indians began to catch and use some of them, and by 1735 they had spread from tribe to tribe by theft or barter all the way from Texas and Oklahoma to what is now the eastern part of the State of Washington, and even into lower Canada.

Our true Spanish horse never was really wild. It was introduced into southern Texas, New Mexico, and southern California by Spanish-Mexican settlers and cow ranchers. True, the Mexicans let the mares and fillies run loose on the range and they got as wild as mustangs. But they were always subjected to a certain amount of haphazard selective breeding because most of the colts were gelded, and only the more likely stallions—that is, those that showed the most of the recognized characteristics of the Spanish barb—were saved. The barb was a grade Arab horse, originally from Morocco, and the aristocratic mount of the Spanish gentleman.

THERE were no real mustangs in California, except a few introduced by the Indians into the country east of the great Sierra divide and in the extreme

north portion of the State. The same was true around the pueblos, forts and missions in South Texas. In both regions thousands and thousands of the real "Spanish horses" were bred. They were slightly larger and a good deal more of the Arab type than the true mustang or "Indian pony" of the plains, although they came to modify the Indian pony to a degree, because the Indian soon began to do a big business stealing horses from both South Texas and California.

Later on, mostly after the Civil War, the great plains became a vast cattle range, and the mustang became a cow pony, just as the Spanish horse had been for a century or more prior to that time, and the two types got more mixed, both in breed and in the public mind.

The mustang was too light to stand up under the heavy, hard riding of American cowboys, unless a string of ten or more animals was maintained for each man. That is what started the haphazard introduction of heavier strains, which ruined the breed. The Spanish horse was not quite so small; still, he was a light horse, like his ancestor the Arab; and the American cowmen, in their quest for size, did some pretty fatal experimenting with that strain, too. They even introduced Percheron—draft horse—blood into the line, with very sad results.

In Texas the true "native" soon became practically extinct, although two valuable lines were derived from it: the Texas quarter horse and the steel-dust. A third and more remote product is the solis, developed by strictly scientific breeding on the great Santa Gertrudis Ranch.

In California, on some of the ranches in the more remote sections of the State, there are still quite a number of "natives" with very little

foreign blood, and there are plenty of cowmen who swear that they are the best horses for their purpose. I was talking to one of the supervisors of Mariposa County just last year, and he told me that "natives" are the common cow horses in his district to-day, and that thoroughbreds and half-breds have both been tried up there and found wanting. He claims they are too "hot"—too excitable to be depended upon, especially when working in close-packed herds of milling cattle.

Of course, there is one subrace of the Spanish horse that is well known to all the readers of Western Story Magazine. That is the palomino, the "golden horse of the golden West," as it has been designated in recent publicity. The horse has simply skyrocketed to fame in the last few years.

An article on the palomino appeared in the Western Story Magazine of January 7, 1933. I believe it was the first ever published on the subject. Considerable research has failed to uncover an earlier one. It was followed almost immediately by a number of others in various publications. Since then the Palomino Horse Association has been organized and the palomino stud book has been established, and the price of palomino horses has risen *two to eight* times what it was in '33, with plenty of buyers and few who are willing to sell!

THUS this spectacular "native offshoot, its own history going back at least a hundred and twenty-five years, has at last been raised to the status of a true breed, like the thoroughbred, the Morgan, the Arab, and the rest of equine aristocrats. Fittingly enough, the headquarters of the Palomino Association is at Santa Barbara,

which has a traditional claim to being the birthplace of the race, and its president is Dwight Murphy, millionaire cattleman, and one of the pioneers in the palomino revival.

In this regard let me add a personal note to the kind people who still write in about that palomino article. I can't buy a palomino horse for you, and I can't even tell you where you can get one. I used to try my best to give information on the subject, but when one Eastern horse breeder wrote, saying he wanted to get a whole string of registered stock to start a stud on his New York farm, I found by extensive correspondence that he would have to comb the whole West, literally from Texas to Washington, and then would fall short of getting the number of suitable animals he wanted. So I gave up. Palominos are just too hard to get.

Of course, the question arises: Is the palomino really a cow horse, or is he a show horse? The answer is that he is both. Going back into his history you will recall that the palomino was the favorite pet horse of the *rancheros* in Spanish California because of his spectacular coloring—golden-dun, with silver mane and tail. He was no different in race from the rest of the Spanish-barb descendants in the *ranchero's* remuda, all good cow horses, and although the *ranchero* liked to ride him to weddings, *bailes*, and other dress-up occasions, he also rode him on the round-up.

He had to be a good sound cow horse, fast, quick, with the wonderful endurance that was characteristic of the old Spanish barb, and with plenty of cow savvy that had been bred into the race through a century of ranch work down there in old Mexico.

If he could not get out and work

with the best of the horses at rodeo time the *ranchero* didn't want him. Poor performers, no matter how beautiful, got knocked on the head, their hides sold to the Yankee traders and their carcasses fed to the Indians. Such horses died very young and left no descendants to weaken the strain. That was selective breeding a la California.

A special feature that was developed early in the palomino was a very rapid running walk. A good horse can knock off six to seven miles an hour without breaking into a trot or a lope. And he will keep it up for hours on end. This walking speed is very important to a rider who has a lot of wide open spaces to cover, for in spite of what you see in the movies, cowboys don't work *all* the time on a dead run!

Yes, the palomino is a real cow horse, and there are a lot of them on ranches in California and elsewhere in the West. But the point is that the ranchers aren't very eager about selling them. Not the good ones, anyway. Ranchers, as a rule, are a good deal like the Arabs of the desert—they'll hang on to their best

horseflesh until the last bean is boiled, the last boot is fried, and the last well is dry. Then maybe they'll sell the poorest half of what they have left.

In the case of palominos this is double true for two reasons. In the first place, a palomino is the easiest horse in the world of which to make a pet. Selling him is like selling one of the children. And in the second place, palomino market is a seller's market right now, and the ranchers know it. It's hard to get a rancher to sell anything on a rising market.

However, the palomino is a show-off horse exceeded by none. He is a foremost leader of parades and spectacles. Rodeo and circus audiences love them. The greatest circus horse of all time, Silver King, was a palomino.

Perhaps you saw in the papers a while back that Sheriff Eugene Biscailuz, of Los Angeles County, won a horsemanship contest at the opening of San Francisco's golden gate bridge. Sheriff Biscailuz is the scion of an old Spanish family, and, fittingly enough, his favorite mount is a palomino.

A Complete Novel, "GUN FIENDS OF CRAZY CREEK,"

by ARTHUR HAWTHORNE CARHART,

in Next Week's Issue.

HORSES HAVE SLEEPING SICKNESS

IT is not a usual thing for animals to take on the diseases of human beings, with the exception of pneumonia and colds. But in Fremont County, Colorado, sleeping sickness was discovered taking toll among horses. Several animals were found dead, and when their blood was tested, it was found to contain the germs that are believed to cause this strange illness which usually results in death. Twenty-five of the horses had died before the cause was discovered. The veterinarian believed the disease had been spread by mosquitoes.

The first symptom is that the animal is unable to walk. Later it goes into a coma and then the throat becomes paralyzed.



CROOKED BACK TRAILS

By ORA GORDON

THE late afternoon sun beat down on the rippling back muscles of young Rex Harmon as he shoveled sand and gravel into the sluice box. His eager brown eyes were angry, his unlined, youthful face was sullen, and every movement of his supple young body was needlessly violent.

"Give us one more shovelful, Rexie, this looks purty good—maybe three, four dollars to-day," old Amos Hackby predicted hopefully, as he gently swayed the rocker, back and forth, back and forth, endlessly.

"What's three or four dollars?" Rex demanded. "Besides, it's never

that much, and you know it! We don't average more than a dollar and a half a day. You won't even go over to White Water, where they've struck it rich." He added accusingly: "You act as though you're scared to death to have me step out of our own dooryard. And I'm fed up with it!"

"Ye mean you're fed up on it. Fed an' clothed an' housed." Amos glanced lovingly across the clearing to where their neat little cabin stood beyond a bend in the stream. "We're doin' a lot better since ye got big enough to help me so good, Rexie, an' we got a thousand dollars in the bank."

"What's a thousand dollars? You can't do a thing with that little wad! If it was ten thousand, now, we could buy the Barker place and get us a start in cows. This isn't living! I hate this deadly existence!" Rebellion pulsed in every line of young Rex.

The distant whistle of the train came to them, faintly from where it began the slow climb around Red Mountain, five miles away.

"There goes the train!" said Amos. "Tain't often the air's jest right so's we can hear it. Did you hear it, Rexie?"

"By golly, I wish we had some of the gold it carries every so often! We'd have enough to do something, then!"

"Don't talk like a fool!" Amos spoke sharply. He added more mildly: "Of course, this life ain't highly excitin', but they's food in plenty, an' good clean air to breathe, an' a nice little log house——"

Again Amos lifted troubled eyes to glimpse the tall, pink hollyhocks nodding beside the cabin door. "An' there's freedom," he added.

"Well, why don't you go on and finish? I know what you're always thinking, go on and say it! 'Uncle Pete in the pen down in Carson would think this life pretty grand!'"

"Jest so! Jest so!" the old man answered earnestly. "I don't want ——" He broke off, wiped the sweat from his forehead with his sleeve, and began again. "I don't want to seem to be expectin' dire things of ye, son, an' if I been holdin' the reins a mite too tight, it's 'cause young blood's so hot-headed. I couldn't stand to have anythin' happen to ye, Rexie. I don't want ye should be gittin' in no trouble."

"Trouble? What trouble? Just because my own father died in prison, and Uncle Pete will probably

be there the rest of his life, and the rest of the Harmon band was wiped out——"

"All but Clyde!" Amos put in sadly.

"Yes," Rex answered swiftly. "Clyde escaped when I ran out into the bushes and warned him. And I'm glad. Now what do you think about that? Clyde was ten years older than I. I looked up to him—idolized him. I suppose, now, you think I'm doomed for perdition sure. I wish I could see Clyde again. He had life in him! That sheep-herder said he saw him yesterday."

"Heaven forbid!" Amos answered fervently. "Clyde's a bad one!" He went on more gently: "Ye got me wrong, son. I don't think ye're goin' the crooked trail jest 'cause somebody else did. I've allus believed that the way a feller's raised, an' his surroundin's, has a lot more to do with the kind of a man he grows into, than his ancestors has. I know——"

"Yes, and I know!" Rex broke in furiously. "I'm not like you! I can't stand this a minute longer!" He snapped erect, swung the shovel three times around his head, and let it fly. It crashed out into the bushes, yards away.

"Rexie!" Amos shouted sternly.

"I'm gone!" Rex shouted back as he ran. "And when I come back I'll have more—a lot more than a thousand dollars!" He was already halfway to the pasture, among the juniper and piñon, beyond the cabin.

"Rexie!" he thought turbulently. "Rexie! And me eighteen to-day, a man grown. I'll never go back. I'll never work an old worn-out placer again as long as I live."

He reached the pasture gate and gave a sharp whistle. "Come, fella!" he called. "Come, Stormy,

boy!" A beautiful buckskin came trotting out of the brush to meet him. Amos had given it to him when it was a colt, four years ago, and there was something of fire and wildness in the horse that matched a feeling within himself. "Come on, Stormy, old boy, we're going to go places and do things," he whispered.

He led the horse to the near-by barn, saddled it, and dashed away without a backward look. "Faster, Stormy, faster!" The horse responded until he fairly flew over the ground, his dark-brown mane and tail streaming out in the wind like banners. The spirit of Rex soared. The anger was gone, and only the rebellion remained. Rebellion and a sense of release, a bounding freedom.

WHEN the road dropped down into an arroyo and followed its winding course for a mile or more, Rex slowed to a walk, thinking deeply. He really loved Amos; Amos had been so good to him. He would always be grateful to him for giving him a home and bringing him up right. But Amos was getting old, and full of fears; and these last two years unrest, within himself, had burned like a fire.

He didn't have to land behind prison bars or go the crooked road just because the rest of the men of his family had gone that way! If Amos didn't believe in inherited bad blood, as he claimed, what was he scared of, Rex asked himself. One thing sure, *he* didn't believe in it! Not if a man had any will power. A man could be what he wanted to be. He'd show Amos the stuff he was made of, before he was through.

But young Rex Harmon didn't know, himself, the stuff of which he was made. But old Amos Hackby

knew, knew the potential good and bad of him.

Rex decided he would first ride to Tarweed and celebrate his birthday in suitable fashion. Then, tomorrow, he'd go out to the Barker place and see who had been lucky enough to have the ten thousand to buy it. He liked that place, timber, and water, and grass—an ideal cattle spread. Perhaps he could get a job riding for the new owners.

As Rex neared the last bend before climbing out of the gully another horseman rounded the turn from the opposite direction. Both men jerked to a stop with not more than ten paces between them. The other man was tall and slender. His brown eyes beneath straight dark brows were unreadable. The wide-brimmed hat he wore was pushed to the back of his head and a mop of curly, auburn hair hung in wild disorder over his forehead.

But Rex had eyes only for the gun in the man's hand—a gun pointed straight at his own heart.

"Climb down, young fella," the stranger ordered tersely. "I want your horse."

"Aw—say——" Rex began.

"Pronto!" demanded the other, and swung to the ground. "Climb down."

Rex obeyed, but kept an arm over Stormy's shoulder. "I raised this horse from a colt. He's everything I got in the world. Please don't take——" Rex dodged to miss the descending gun barrel.

As he sprang upright he lunged toward the bandit. His right hand only fastened in the man's shirt front, but his left gripped the fellow's gun arm and bent the barrel downward just as the hammer came down. The shot dug harmlessly into the sand. Rex had muscles and sinews that were tempered and

tough. A forceful jerk pulled the man within the grasp of his arms. Now they were eye to eye, chest to chest. Rex gasped.

"Clyde! Why, Clyde!"

The other stared. Rex relaxed and cried out again: "Clyde, don't you know me? I'm Rex, your brother, Rex!"

"Well, I'd be bit by a sidewinder!" Clyde Harmon released his hold, and the gun fell with a soft thud to the sand. "If it ain't my little brother growed up! I'd never in the world have known you, kid, kid!"

"Well, I'd have known you anywhere from here to Timbuktu! Golly, I was wishing I could see you, Clyde. Let's ride on to Tarweed and you can help me celebrate my eighteenth birthday. I've got three dollars to blow."

"Aw, I thought you'd growed up! You look big enough! Come along with me, kid, I've got the sweetest little hang-out you ever laid eyes on. Come on, and we can have a good old confab."

"All right, Clyde, that'll be fine. How far away is this place?"

"Only a few miles."

"Your horse is plumb tuckered out. We can take turns riding Stormy," Rex offered. "He won't carry double. Anyway, ever since he cut one of his forefeet on barbed wire he goes lame with any extra weight. Can't even carry a shoe. That's how come I don't shoe him in front."

"Oh, I guess mine'll take me home," Clyde answered. "That wasn't what I wanted another horse for."

WHEN they came to a glade high up in the hills, Rex saw the newly made camp between overhanging cliffs. Recessed on one side was a pocket behind a

bluff where a small fire could be made, without being seen from the outside. At the right of the camp was a little grass-covered meadow with a small, clear stream running through the center of it. The space where Clyde had unrolled his blankets, back against the cliff, commanded a view of three sides of the rolling country below. It was impossible for any one to approach during daylight hours without being seen.

There was little talk between the two brothers as Clyde made coffee and fried bacon and potatoes for their evening meal; Rex, meanwhile, unsaddled the horses and picketed them in the meadow. He felt as though the last ten years with Amos had been blotted out. It was as though his life, now, was joined to that other life he had lived before that terrible day when the outlaw band had been killed or captured by the enraged posse.

He felt a mounting sense of exhilaration and freedom, almost a conviction of having come home. But still, underneath that feeling, like the rock foundation of a house, he also had a knowledge of the danger, instability, and disaster of the old life.

At last the two sat on the blankets side by side, smoking and gazing out over the country below them, watching Red Mountain thrust long shadow fingers out into the purple haze of the range.

"I always sorter liked this country," Clyde said.

"Yep," Rex agreed. "God's country!"

Clyde turned to face his brother, and for several minutes he studied the unlined young face without speaking. He smoked slowly, his eyes unfathomable. At last Rex could bear the scrutiny no longer.

There was something he, too, must know.

"Clyde, you're not—you're traveling straight, now, of course!"

Clyde puffed a moment longer before he spoke.

"All depends on what you call—straight."

"Well, the law, and all that. You know what I mean. You're on the right side, now, Clyde?"

"All depends on what you call the right side."

Again there was silence, a long silence. It was broken by Clyde.

"You ask me if I'm trailin' straight. What is straight? No Harmon, nor one of the gang, ever hurt a dumb beast, robbed from the poor, or broke his word, or killed a man—unless he needed killin'! We helped the unfortunate when we could, never took a dime from anybody that couldn't afford to lose it; and we had a swingin', singin' freedom. The earth belongs to us to have and to use. Is that goin' straight, me laddie buck?"

It was Rex's turn to hesitate. He remembered well enough the law of the old Harmon gang. In the old days those rules had seemed right. But now, for all the talk, there was a false note some place. And yet, within Rex, there leaped a feeling of agreement with Clyde's philosophy.

"Yes, I suppose in a way it is," Rex answered slowly. "But our father died in prison, and Pete will be there the rest of his life. And it is outside the law, Clyde."

"Law? And what's the law? Is it honest decision of what's just between right and wrong? Or is it a lot of silly, hampering rules made by a bunch of crooked politicians only interested in feathering their own nests? And who gets the money—they that earns it?" Bit-terness filled Clyde's tone.

Rex thought of good old Amos, who had worked and denied himself all these years to save a thousand dollars. "No," he agreed, "not always."

Until inky darkness gathered up the hills below them, the talk went on. Talk, and long silences; while the convincing urgency of Clyde's voice played upon the strings of unrest and rebellion in the heart of Rex, until it seemed to him, after all, that the old outlaw life had more of right than any other.

The long whistle of the train, muted to softness by the distance, drifted up to them. In the silence they could hear the puffing of the engine, like heart throbs, as it labored up Red Mountain.

When the sound died away, Clyde leaned close.

"Say, listen, kid!" His voice was urgent. "I've got a sure thing where I can get hold of a lot of money, a regular haul of it. I've always thought a lot of you, and I'm goin' to let you in on it!"

"I don't think, Clyde, that I'm hankering for any prison sentence." However, Rex's voice was wistful as he added: "But I wish I had ten thousand dollars."

"Aw, this is safe, I tell you, safe as a church!" Clyde's insistent voice went on. "Now, listen! This is what it is. Sam Keller, the baggage man on the train running through to-morrow afternoon, is a friend of mine—" Clyde's convincing, pressing voice droned on, and on, until at last he finished with: "It's as simple as that, and we can live the rest of our days in comfort and peace."

"Yes, Clyde, but—" Rex began.

"I need your horse, kid. Mine's too worn out and slow to make a quick get-away. That's all you'll have to do. Just help me load

Stormy; then I'll fade away into the brush, and you bring the haul here and cache it. Nobody'll be any the wiser and you'll have your ten thousand. That's a darned good price for the rent of a horse for a few hours."

"Ten thousand!" murmured Rex. "Then Amos and I could buy the Barker place."

"Sure," Clyde encouraged. "You could buy quite a spread with ten thousand. You won't have to do a thing but lend me your horse. And that mining outfit back in Butte will never miss this money. They're a big, rich outfit."

"I remember Uncle Pete used to say, 'To them that has is given,'" Rex said musingly.

Clyde laid a hand on his knee. "You'll stick with me, kid, until this is over?" he asked softly.

"I'll stick!" Rex promised.

AMOS worked slowly the rest of that afternoon, more troubled than he liked to admit. He had tried hard to keep Rex close until he could reach maturity and harden in ways that were good. Amos had been an orphan. He had never married. He had poured out to Rex the accumulation of affection that normally he would have given to a whole family. He realized that he couldn't hold the boy any longer, and he determined to put into effect at once a plan that he had held in mind for a long time.

Of course, a thousand dollars wouldn't buy a swell outfit, already stocked; but the four sections, adjoining his own little forty, back toward the range beyond Red Mountain, was government land. He could buy it with a small down payment and a long-time contract. And there would still be money enough to get a few calves for a start. He'd

tell Rex as soon as he came home. He would come back, of course; he always had before when he flew off the handle this way.

But the next morning Rex had not come home. Noon came, and still no Rex. He had never stayed away this long before. Amos waited until two o'clock, then saddled his horse and started out to look for him, a hundred conjectures stabbing at his mind.

He stopped short when he came to the tracks in the arroyo where Rex and Clyde had met. Amos would have known Stormy's unshod, front-foot tracks among a million others. The wire cut, in healing, had turned the hoof slightly outward. It made a track different from all others. Amos found it easy to trail the two horses until they reached the shelving limestone below Red Mountain. There he lost the tracks and, search as he would, could not pick them up again.

He heard the train whistle and turned toward the railroad. It wasn't often he could watch the train go past. He hurried. Cresting a sandy hummock a sight met his eyes that seared its way into his brain forever.

The side door of the baggage car was wide open. The baggage man was helping another man in through the open door, as the train moved slowly into the steep grade. Then Amos saw both men throwing a perfect rain of small, heavy-looking sacks from the car toward a thicket of buckthorn. He turned his head and saw two horses standing behind the thicket. There was no mistaking Stormy's satiny, gleaming hide; then he saw Rex, squatted on his heels, holding the horses. Amos felt as though the heart within him would burst.

His glance flew back to the slowly

moving train. The baggage man was lying on the floor, now, and the other man was tying him with a rope. When he had finished, he jumped from the train and began gathering up sacks; then Amos saw that it was Clyde Harmon.

Rage seized Amos, crowding out all other feeling. He dug heels into the flanks of his horse and tore down the hillside, pulling his old horse pistol from its ancient holster as he went. He drew the big hammer back. Clyde swung around just as Amos threw himself from his horse.

"Hands up, both o' ye!" he yelled. "Ye—ye blitherin' idjets! Up with 'em!"

Rex lifted his hands high; but Clyde, with a vile epithet for Amos, went for his gun. His draw was lightninglike; his face was entirely evil as he palmed the hammer back and fired with almost one motion.

REX stood rooted to the spot. He tried to shout, but no sound came from his constricted throat. He saw that Amos, though he had been obliged to take both hands to it, had fired the old horse pistol. At the same time he had thrown himself down and forward, and the bullet from Clyde's gun had passed harmlessly over his head.

But Clyde, with gaping astonishment, threw arms up and fell stiffly forward on his face. The old gun had done its work. A bullet hole showed in the dead center of his forehead. Rex knew that Clyde was dead.

"You've killed him!" Rex cried, leaping toward Amos. "You've killed my brother!"

"Yes, ye dupe! Ye—ye thief! I killed him!" Amos had scrambled to his feet. He brought the old pis-

tol around. His eyes were blazing, his face white. Never had Rex seen Amos like that. There was force, power in him. "Go!" he hurled the word. "Go, before I kill you, too!"

Rex had turned and was stumbling away when Amos cried out again:

"Rex—wait——" Amos was running after him, digging into his pockets as he came. He hauled out a few bills. "Here," he panted. "Here, take this, it's all I've got with me. Take it and go. I'll load the stuff on burros and take it through the mountains to Carson. That's where it's billed fer. An' when I git close enough I'll turn the burros loose. Somebody'll round 'em up. That'll save yer darned hide. Now git out of my sight! We don't talk the same tongue!" He thrust the bills toward him, but Rex struck his hand down.

The bills fell to the ground. Rex turned and fled from those scornful eyes, that blistering tongue. He was beyond the knoll down which Amos had catapulted, before he remembered his horse. He gave the familiar whistle several times, but no Stormy came to him. He crept back and peered over the hummock.

The train had passed from sight around the first curve. The dead man still lay as he had fallen, arms outflung. And Amos was loading the gold on Stormy and Clyde's horse.

Rex turned away without heed to direction or destination. He felt numbed, his mind almost blank; after a while the last bit of strength seemed to flow out of his body. He threw himself down in the shade of a juniper and buried his face in his arms.

Then, feeling slowly returned as scene after scene of yesterday seared through his chaotic mind. He felt

years older than the callow youth who had so petulantly thrown away his shovel.

He saw Clyde as he was ten years ago, at twenty. A young, handsome, dashing Clyde. A Clyde who always had time to teach a little eight-year-old brother how to ride, and swim, and fish. Clyde had taught him about the wild things and about the clouds—as the two lay on their backs in some green meadow—and the meaning of each kind. He had shown him how to fish, and how to make whistles out of willow withes.

Rex could hear again, Clyde's wheedling, persuasive voice, giving the old gang law. "Never to hurt a dumb beast—never to rob the poor—never to kill a man, unless he needed killing—" What better did a man need to live by than that!

And Amos had shot Clyde down. Clyde was dead. Rex's heart twisted with grief for his brother. He hated Amos! He wished he had fought it out with him, some way.

At last he arose, determined to go home and try to get his horse. Darkness descended swiftly, and thorny things clutched at him. He slipped into gullies, plodded through sand, until it was past midnight when he blundered up to the corral.

Stormy, and Clyde's horse were in the barn, but Amos's horse and the burros were gone. Then Amos had already started through the mountains with the gold. Again he felt that mighty surge of hatred for Amos; then, suddenly, he knew what he was going to do.

H E'D follow Amos and, somehow, he'd take that gold away from him. It would serve him right if, for once in his life, Amos failed in his self-righteous

course of action. What could Amos know about family ties? Why, blood ties were the strongest bonds on earth. He saddled Stormy and took the trail to follow Amos.

It was long past sunrise and still Rex hadn't come up with the plodding burros. Once in the trail they would move along steadily without waste of time. And when they were turned loose, they would, very likely, plod right along to the nearest habitation, while a horse turned loose would beat it back for home as fast as he could travel. Rex knew that was the reason Amos had taken the burros.

He was well down on the Carson Valley side when he heard the hum of angry voices. There was cursing and shouting, and a crashing of brush below him. Quickly Rex reined out of the trail and tied Stormy in a thicket. He crept out to the edge of a point and peered over.

There below him not a hundred yards away was a mob of men—angry men. They were led by a square-jawed, brown-faced farmer who was followed closely by Sam Keller, baggage man of the train. They were herding the burros and Amos toward a cottonwood in the bottom of the ravine. Quickly they formed a circle around Amos. The leader turned to face Keller.

"Now, stranger," he said tersely, "tell us again just what happened."

Keller cleared his throat. "As the train started upgrade around Red Mountain, slowlike, two men hopped into the baggage car. One of 'em cracked me on the head with a gun barrel; then they overpowered me and tied me up. After that they threw off the whole of a big shipment of gold, routed from the Big Brazos Mine, in Butte, to the Carson City mint. Then they hopped

off, leavin' me tied, but I managed to get my gun out of the shoulder holster and I shot one of 'em. But this old man here, he got away."

Rex could see, without being seen. And he could hear clearly.

"Sounds like the work of the old Harmon gang!" said a sandy-haired man on a rawboned sorrel.

"One of 'em was Clyde Harmon, of the old Harmon gang," Keller answered. "And this old man is the fellow that took the little Harmon kid to raise. He was helpin' Clyde Harmon throw out the gold."

An angry chorus burst from the men: "Too bad we didn't get both of 'em when we got the rest, ten years ago!" shouted one.

"We'll make short work of 'em now!" cried another.

"Where's that rope?" demanded the leader.

The rope snaked out. Amos's hat was knocked from his head. The rope settled about his neck. His hands were tied behind his back.

But Amos stood still, quiet amid all the shouting and turmoil. A smile was on his lips, and the steady blue eyes did not falter. Never had Rex seen those shoulders straighter.

AMOS lifted his eyes toward the mountaintop, and it seemed to Rex that he was looking straight into his own eyes. He could see their expression, quiet and calm. He could see Amos's lips move. And he knew they were whispering the words he had heard Amos say many times: "I will lift mine eyes unto the hills, from which cometh my help."

And suddenly it was as though the spirit of Rex broke through an incasing shell, as though scales dropped away from his eyes. He saw Amos as he really was, strong, brave, clean through and through.

WS—8C

And then he saw the Harmon family, as it was in reality. Gone forever, like mist, was its romance and glamour. He saw Clyde as he really had been, saw again Clyde's evil look as he tried to shoot Amos down.

The angry voices reached his consciousness again.

"We'll wipe 'em out!" shouted the man on the sorrel.

"Yeah," added the leader, "we'll find that last Harmon and string him up, too. Make a clean sweep this time, while we're at it!" He threw the other end of the rope over a limb of the tree.

Rex leaped toward the circle of milling men, bringing an avalanche of rocks after him. "Stop!" he shouted. "Wait! You can't do that!" He brought up, scratched and bleeding, at their feet.

"Take that rope off my dad! Can't you see, you blockheads, he was taking the gold on to the mint?" Rex lunged at Keller and jerked him from the saddle. "This is the snake that planned it all!" he gritted, shaking Keller furiously. "He lies when he says dad had anything to do with it—lies, I tell you! And I could kill him with my bare hands!"

The mob stared, slack-jawed.

"Rexie!" Amos cried.

Rex let the man go and he fell in a heap. He dusted his hands together and turned to the others. "I'll tell you the whole truth, from beginning to end."

"Rex, keep still," Amos commanded.

"No, dad, I won't keep still! I'll tell everything and take my punishment."

"Don't listen! String him up!" Keller screamed.

"Shut up," the sandy one answered. "We'll hear what he's got to say."

"Yes, begin at the beginning and talk fast, my young friend!" said the brown-faced leader.

Rex made no effort to spare himself. He told the whole story simply, truthfully, quickly. "And you see," he ended, "Amos Hackby is not only not guilty of any wrong, but he almost gave his life to return the gold, and to protect me, worthless thing that I am! So now you know the truth. You know that I'm the last of the Harmones. And if you must hang me, go ahead, but let Amos go."

Rex turned to Amos and Amos's face was radiant. He, himself, felt cleansed. Cleansed and strong and unafraid.

"Aw, let's let 'em go! We've got the gold, and the kid's tellin' the truth, if ever I heard it."

"But not this train feller!" protested another. "Hey, stop him, stop him!"

Keller was trying to slip away, but half a dozen hands soon brought him back and trussed him up.

"We'll take him in and turn him over to the law," said the leader. "The bullet will soon prove whether he killed Clyde Harmon."

REX went to Amos and, lifting the rope from his neck, freed his hands and led the horse on which he sat out through the group and up the trail. In a few moments there was a shout from the crowd. "Wait," some one called.

Rex saw a tall figure on a big black ride from the group toward them. A star gleamed on the man's vest.

"It's the sheriff," Amos said.

"I'll likely have to go to prison, dad," Rex answered, "but I don't want you to worry about that. After I've paid the debt I'll be out

again and you'll be waiting——" He broke off.

"Yes, son, I'll be waitin'!" Amos replied.

The sheriff rode up to them and offered a hand to Amos.

"The boys have told me what happened, Mr. Hackby. I want to thank you for what you've done. There's a reward for Clyde Harmon of five thousand dollars from this county and another five thousand from Humboldt County for the Cactus Kid, who is one and the same man. I'll see that you get it, and that your burros are sent home as soon as everything is verified." He turned to Rex. "And mind you—you scalawag—no more wild oats from you!"

"No, sheriff," Rex returned meekly.

He turned back, and Rex and Amos went on up to the trail and Stormy. "I won't take the reward money, Rex. Not for yer brother. So let's jest fergit about it," Amos said.

"No, I want you to take it. It can't do Clyde any harm. And I'm glad, now, that Clyde can't do any one else any harm, either. You were right, dad, Clyde was a bad one. Though he could have been all right."

"Yes," answered Amos, "he jest didn't see straight."

"That's it!" Rex agreed.

They reached the spot where Stormy had been tied. Rex swung into the saddle, and they turned into the homeward trail together.

"We'll see," Amos said, "if the Hunter place is still up fer sale."

"And to-morrow," Rex added, "we'll see if we can rock out three or four dollars from the old placer!"

"Ah, Rexie!" Amos's voice was husky as he leaned over and rested a bony old hand on Rex's shoulder.



DOUBLE CROSS AT TRAILCROSS

By CLIFF WALTERS

Author of "Rope Ruse," etc.

AS Jim Orchard, puncher, walked past the Arrow H blacksmith shop on his way to the corrals, he stopped to stare with disapproving blue eyes at the new shoes which had been nailed to the hoofs of the stocking-footed sorrel horse tied there. Frowning, he went into the little shop, grabbed up some tools and started to remove the ill-fitting shoes.

The last shoe was coming off, and beads of perspiration were trickling over Jim's eyebrows, when the

sound of spurs caused him to glance up from his task; glance into Howard Kyle's anger-flushed face.

"What do you think you're doin' there?" demanded Kyle, the other puncher at the Arrow H, and a nephew of old Mac McGovern, owner of the outfit. "That sorrel happens to be in my string!"

"Yeah, and you're supposed to shoe him," Jim answered. "But with all your rasp whittlin', you couldn't make number two hoofs fit number one shoes. My Gosh, Howard! Go saddle another horse. I'll shoe this

sorrel. And with shoes he can travel on without cripplin' him all up."

"It kinda griped you to break that sorrel, and then have me take him in my string, didn't it?" Kyle parried. "Say listen—I've forgot more about shoein' horses than——"

"You must've forgot all you ever did know, the way you shod this one," Jim said.

"So you've worked here for all of six months, and now you're runnin' the layout. Get away from my horse or I'll dish out what you've been askin' for!"

Jim dropped the hoof he was working on, eyed Howard, and said, "If you can't fight any better'n you shoe horses and shoot beef—which you always drill down through the snoot—you'd better——"

He didn't finish. Kyle's fist came at him fast. The blow raked the side of his jaw, knocked him down to one knee. But he bounded up, feinted with his left hand, and shot across a hard-right to the other puncher's jaw. Kyle, swept backward by the force of the blow, jarred against the log wall of the shop and went down. He sat there dazed for a moment.

He was about to get up when around the corner of the barn came limping old Mac McGovern. Jim had gone back to his horseshoeing by the time the old man came in. McGovern drawled:

"Thought you was ridin' this sorrel, Howard?"

"Yep," said his nephew. "But Jim's a lot better shoer than I am. He's helpin me out a little."

"Huh!" grunted old Mac. "Jim's a heap more agreeable than the punchers I used to work with. How you gettin' along with Walreeth, the sheep, over on your end of the range, Jim?"

"Oh, we've been givin' each other

a good lettin' alone," came the reply. "Since our last tangle, he's kept his woollies over on their side of the divide. And I'm seein', or tryin' to, that no Arrow H cattle edge over on him."

"If you can get along with that wart hog, you're better'n Howard or me."

"Guess I'll saddle another horse and ride, Jim," said Kyle, with disarming geniality.

"Wait a minute," old Mac cut in. "I—I'm thinkin' some of movin' into Trailcross, since I'm gettin' purty old to do any ridin'. Want to spring a little proposition on you and Jim. How'd you two like to lease the Arrow H? I'll give you a good deal on it, and stake you to expense money to tide you over the first year."

"Gosh, Mac!" Jim blurted. "That's a cow-puncher's dream come true. With a swell layout like this I——"

He stopped abruptly. He had glanced at Howard Kyle, whose gray eyes burned with a revealing flash of hostility.

He added lamely, "But I'm not much for partnerships."

"Huh!" Mac answered. "You wouldn't expect me to turn my nephew out, lease the layout to you alone, would you?"

"Nope," Jim replied. "I—I expect Howard could handle it alone. And he'd rather do it that way."

"This is a two-man spread," Mac answered gruffly. "And I happen to like your way of handlin' cattle. I was kinda plannin' on you stayin', Jim. I still don't see why——"

"Sure he'll stay!" Kyle interrupted. "He's a little disgusted with the way I do things. But we'll talk him into it, Uncle Mac. How about thinkin' it over, Jim?"

"If he's smart, he will," old Mac

said, limping on toward the ranch house.

"Why do you want me in on the deal?" Jim asked, when he and Kyle were alone. "Or maybe you want somebody around that'll tend to business while you're off chasin' poker games, like you've been doin' lately."

"You goin' to tell the old man that?" Kyle asked. "And thinkin' you'll grab this lease off alone?"

"I'm not in the habit of blabbin', am I?"

"Nope. You're an all-round good feller, Jim. And I'd sure like to have you for a pard."

With a strange laugh, Kyle pulled his saddle from the sorrel's back and lugged it away toward the corrals.

OLD MAC broached the lease proposition again the next day, and grew a bit irritable at Jim's hesitancy. It annoyed Jim, also. He recognized the fine opportunity old Mac was offering him. Fine, except for one thing: the unreliability of Howard Kyle, who must be included in the deal. An unreliability that Jim would never reveal to old Mac.

The third time Jim started to hedge, the old cowman stormed, "You seem to think you'd be doin' me a big favor in takin' on my outfit, Jim! Don't get the crazy idee into your head. If you think I'm goin' to beg you—"

"Have a little patience, Uncle Mac," Howard Kyle said, with a queer smile. "We'll talk him into it yet, or make him give some good reason for refusin'."

Jim's jaw tightened as he flashed a look at Kyle. It was only a strong will that kept him from speaking his mind. He wanted to call Kyle's bluff, jar that goading smile off the other man's face. Yet he hesitated

to make accusations, be forced into proving them—and cause, perhaps, an irreconcilable breach between a trusting old man and his only kin.

"Have an answer ready next time, Jim," growled old Mac.

"I will, Mac. I sure like this lay-out."

He walked away toward the bunk house where he slept. But he didn't go to sleep. He kept remembering Kyle's goading smile, kept realizing the hazards and unpleasantness which, he reasoned, would come of a partnership with Kyle.

"Old Mac got his heart set on retirin' and movin' to town," he thought. "Well, I'll think it over some more to-morrow. But I don't think there'll be any pardship with Kyle. Dang his peculiar hide! Why couldn't he have been another kind!"

The corral gate creaked, the sound of hoofs died away. Vaguely, Jim remembered that Kyle had been all dressed up to go to the dance in Trailcross.

WISHING to avoid old Mac, Jim left the ranch at day-break the next morning for his day's ride off to the south range. Off to the east dawn spread her blazing fan, and brightened a world with light which transformed every sandstone promontory with a golden ship anchored in a vast sea of sage. The deep blue of larkspur blossoms splashed color across slopes where meadow larks serenaded the coming day.

Yet Jim Orchard moved in a gray world, this morning. He had been offered something that he wanted very much, but which he dared not take. Grimly, reluctantly, he decided the best thing he could do would be to quit his job this evening, and start looking for another.

It was not a pleasant choice. It galled him to think of passing up the fine opportunity which Howard Kyle was spoiling for him.

Frowning, he rode up the slope of the divide which separated cattle and sheep range. A half dozen small bunches of cattle he turned back. He was after the last bunch, was trailing along the crest of the high divide, when he saw the carcasses of a cow and calf which lay on the south slope.

He spurred in that direction, saw that the animals had been shot.

"The dirty skunk!" He eyed the sheep camp below, which belonged to Dave Walreeth. "Twice I've chased his edgin'-over woollies back to his sleepy sheep-herder. But when a cow and calf edges over on to his range——"

Angrily, he spurred toward the sheep camp, sudden hatred for Dave Walreeth flaring within him. He was about to swing down from the crest of the rocky divide when, off to the west, he sighted a rider dodging into the head of a draw.

"Walreeth!" he growled. "Well, he picked the wrong draw when he picked that one. I'll head him off!"

The rangy roan he was riding leaped into action, angling at a fast clip toward a bend of the draw which the sheepman had taken.

It was not long before Jim was halting his roan on the rim of that draw and sliding, afoot, down that precipitous embankment. Dirt-smeared, he jarred to a stop at the bottom of the decline. From around the bend, above, came the sound of hurrying hoofs, an echoing yell, and the bark of a gun.

But the rider who appeared first was not the belligerent sheepman, Walreeth. It was Howard Kyle, still dressed in his dancing clothes,

who came charging down past the clump of brush where Jim stood. Kyle emitted a loud groan as, sliding his horse to a halt, he observed that the floor of the draw had been caved off by flood waters, leaving a drop of some thirty feet ahead.

Jim saw him turn, look back in desperation. Then Walreeth, brandishing a gun, burst into view. The infuriated sheepman yelled:

"I've got you now where I want you."

"Drop that gun, Walreeth!"

JIM had taken the sheepman unaware, with stunning surprise.

"So you've baited me into a trap, have you?" Walreeth raged, dropping his gun. "That dirty cow-killin' buzzard"—he nodded at Kyle—"leads me in here, and now——"

"What's that about him killin' cattle?" Jim asked.

"He did, all right!" Walreeth roared. "My herder seen him. A cow and calf—just over the divide. He done it to get me in trouble. But I'd of soon settled his hash if you hadn't showed up just now, Orchard!"

"He's lyin', Jim!" Kyle gulped. "Pull that trigger while you've got the drop on him!"

"And get outta your way by goin' to jail, eh?" Jim's voice was cool, his blue eyes steady. "Ain't you askin' quite a lot? I seen that cow and calf—shot low through the snoot, the way you always shoot beef. Yeah! You thought I'd go bustin' down into Walreeth's camp, a place I've been warned away from, and get my fool head shot off."

Already showing the strain of his race for life, Kyle wilted at Jim's accusation. Walreeth boomed: "Then this ain't a trap to ketch me?"

"There'll be no trap springin' to-

day," Jim told him. "Go on back to your sheep range."

"Much obliged, Orchard." Relieved, Walreeth headed back up the draw.

Jim looked hard at Kyle, whose life he had saved. There were many things the puncher wanted to say, wanted to do. But, contemptuously, he turned and made that arduous climb back to his waiting horse.

"Dirty sneak!" he growled, as he rode. "A fine pard he'd make! I've seen enough of Mr. Kyle. I think I'll go back to the ranch right now and tell old Mac I'm travelin'. Even if I won't tell him why."

Slowly, he rode in the direction of the Arrow H. Old Mac met him on that trail. The cowman said:

"Thought I'd ride out and talk to you alone, Jim. Find out why you won't take my lease proposition."

"Well, I——"

"Met Howard a little ways back," old Mac quickly interrupted. "He looked kinda pale around the gills. Like he'd been scared. Told me he was quittin', movin' to new range. I don't s'pose you'd want that lease all alone, would you?"

Jim's eyes brightened. "Gosh, Mac!"

"It's yours," the other man told him.

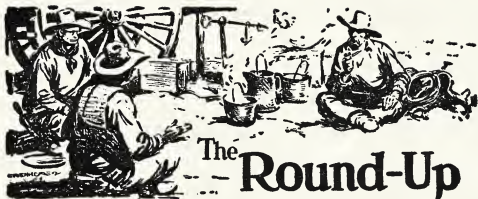
Jim smiled as he looked at the leather case which held the binoculars old Mac always carried on his saddle—and at the hoofprints leading down from the top of the high knoll, a landmark, beside the trail. Jim wondered just how much old Mac had seen from up there with his "glass eyes," as he called them. But he didn't ask any questions.

BEARS NOT ALLOWED

IN a hotel at Yellowstone Park, the desk clerk was just preparing to go off night duty at the commencement of another day, when in walked a very early morning guest. Some guests are not popular at any hotel, and the desk clerk decided at once that this one had better seek quarters elsewhere. Since the early arrival walked on four feet most of the time, and did not speak or understand English, the clerk accompanied his "shoos" and "get outs" with motions indicating that a speedy exit was desired.

The uninvited guest, which was none other than a two-hundred-and-fifty-pound bear, did not know where the door was as he had entered in an unconventional manner through the cellar window. So it jumped over chairs and divans, with the clerk in the rear, calling and gesticulating. But even a bear gets annoyed at being thrown out of a respectable hotel, so it decided to rush the enemy. This resulted in the clerk fleeing for his very life, negotiating pieces of furniture which impeded the bear, and thus helped the clerk to gain on it. And while the bear was thinking over its latest barrier, the clerk reached that impregnable fortress, a telephone booth. Luck was still with him, and he succeeded in getting a ranger on the wire.

While waiting for the ranger, the bear climbed to the fourth floor of the hotel through the open court lobby. Arriving with his rifle, the ranger shot the bear once, and it fell headlong forty feet to the floor. The bullet had struck it right between the eyes.



WE have with us to-night a couple of ladies who have a good word to say about our Missing Department. It warms the cockles of our heart to hear from these people who have been successful in finding their lost friends and relatives. Mrs. C. H. White, of 235 West J Street, Grant's Pass, Oregon, will let us hear what she has to say:

BOSS AND FOLKS:

I want to thank you for helping me locate a relative that has been missing for eighteen years. I cannot tell you how glad and grateful I am.

That only goes to show how widespread Western Story Magazine is circulated, that it would get into the hands of a relative who has been missing for eighteen years. Eighteen years is a long time to be separated from friends. A lot of things can happen in eighteen years, and we are glad that one of the things that happened in this case was that Mrs. White's relative was a reader of good old Western Story Magazine.

And now here comes Mrs. Henrietta Fain, of Fort Worth, Texas,

who is so happy that she wants everybody to know it.

BOSS OF THE ROUND-UP:

I wrote a letter a while back to the Missing Department, asking them to help me find my two uncles. I'm very thankful to you all. I found one of them, and think I know where the other is. I don't know how ever to repay you all for what you have done for me. Oh, I'm so happy. If it had not been for you all, I might not have found him. Thanks a lot.

We hope, Mrs. Fain, that you will be successful in finding your other uncle soon. And any of the rest of you, if you have some one that you have lost track of, don't hesitate to write into the Missing Column. It doesn't cost you anything, and you may be successful in your quest.

Before we close the meeting we want to thank all of you who sent in your kicks about the discontinuance of the departments. If nobody had written in, you would still be without them. We also want to thank the many, many more of you who *meant* to write and say, "bring back our departments," but just didn't get around to it. In every group of people there are always the doers and the going-to doers. Anyway, to all of you, again we say thank you.

MINES AND MINING

By

J. A.

THOMPSON



DESERT gold in cactus-studded Arizona is the quest of Roy Coombs, who plans to make the arid Southwest headquarters this coming winter in his search for yellow metal.

"Arizona prospecting has always held a strong appeal for me," he writes from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. "Particularly the wild, untraveled sections of Pima County, abutting on the Mexican Border. How about this area for placer gold prospecting? Aren't the Quijotoa placers down there somewhere? Anything you can tell me about this part of Arizona as far as gold hunting goes, will be much appreciated. Although I do not plan to start for the Southwest until cold weather sets in up North, I am writing early in order to gather as much data in advance as possible."

You are wise, Roy, not to hit that Pima County country in midsummer. The desert is a blazing terror at that season. It will lower your body moisture, and leaves you parched and leather-dry as an Egyptian mummy. During the winter months, however, the climate is tops. Nights are cool, even cold, the days sun-warmed and glorious.

As for that Quijotoa district you mention, it ought to be a likely place. There is no telling how long the Indians knew this section as a gold field. But it is said that, as far back as 1775, a Castilian priest named Lopez, did extensive placer mining some six miles north of the Quijotoa Mountains, using the Papago Indians for labor. Fifty years later, at about the time gold was being discovered by Marshall at Sutter's Mill in California, Mexicans were still placer mining in the Quijotoas, washing their gold gravel with water brought to them in great jugs by Papago squaws, who obtained the precious fluid from natural tanks in the deeper desert valleys.

In the '80s a lode mining boom brought thousands of prospectors trekking across the desert to the isolated Quijotoas. When the boom petered out, many of them remained to placer. Mushroom mining towns bloomed for a while, then waned—'dobe ghost towns, a million miles from nowhere. But some placering persisted. Prospectors, when they are in mineralized country and there is a chance of a strike, are a die-hard breed. They'll stick, and that, in many cases, has eventually resulted in big discoveries.

During recent seasons there has

been more activity around the Quijotoas again. The probable area over which gold-bearing sands and gravels may occur is undoubtedly extensive. It may even stretch south across the Mexican boundary.

Roads into that country are few and far between. The district itself lies just about in the central part of Pima County, perhaps some seventy miles south and west of Tucson. There is a graded road that strikes out west from Tucson and leads across the desert to Sells. Then it loops back up through Steam Pipe to Covered Wells, just east of the Quijotoa Mountains. This road continues on through Gun Sight to Ajo, and up to the main-traveled Southwestern cross-continental highway, U. S. 80. Aside from this graveled swing of several hundred miles, the rest is open desert, or unimproved sand roads that can be mighty tough going, on occasion.

The Quijotoa Range, running in a general north and south direction, stands some fifteen hundred feet above the surrounding desert plains, and extend from Covered Wells, near the north end of the mountains, to within, perhaps, a score of miles from the Mexican boundary. And it is all country wild enough for the most "outdoorsy." You will practically have to go all the way back to Tucson to see a movie, or get a store-bought hair cut.

Next A. C. T., of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, asks us if staking a placer claim would also cover min-

eral rights to any lode, or veins of gold ore, that might be discovered on the property later. No, it doesn't, A. C. T. If you have a placer claim, and there happens to be within its boundary a lode vein, any stranger can come on your ground and stake the vein as a separate lode claim. Of course, if you discover the vein, or know of its existence, you can stake the lode claim yourself. Naturally,

Any one planning a prospecting trip should be familiar with the use of a gold pan, the yellow metal hunter's most important piece of prospecting equipment. Simple, easy-to-follow instructions on how to pan gold have been prepared for readers, and may be obtained free, simply by writing the Mines And Mining Department, Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y., for a copy, and inclosing a stamped, self-addressed return envelope with your letter.

that is the proper procedure, since, otherwise, the placer claim gives you no protection on it. Incidentally, other prospectors have the right to enter peaceably on unpatented placers claims to locate a lode claim. They don't need to ask the consent of the owner of the placer claim.

Peter D., of Joliet, Illinois, wants to know if any tungsten deposits have been discovered yet in Idaho. They have, Pete. Some pretty good ones, too, in Shoshone, Idaho, Camas, Lemhi, Valley, Boundary, Blaine, Butte, and Bonner Counties.

We desire to be of real help to our readers. If there is anything you want to know about mining or prospecting, a letter inclosing a stamped and self-addressed envelope sent to J. A. Thompson, care of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y., will bring a prompt authoritative personal reply.

Letters unaccompanied by a return envelope will be published in the order in which they are received. But as space is limited, please keep such letters as brief as possible.

The HOLLOW TREE

Conducted by HELEN RIVERS



LODE and pocket hunting in the high mountains, and placer mining in the desert country, leads the old-timer over the trails of the West and Southwest the year 'round. "Otto, of the Gold Country," is outfitted and ready to hit the trail as soon as he finds the right pard.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

Pards, I have followed placer mining for about five years steady, as my only means of a living. I have a grubstake and plan to go lode and pocket hunting. I have an outfit, and enough to see me through the summer in the mountains and the winter in the desert. All I need is transporta-

tion and a partner near my age, which is forty-five. If I can find the right kind of a partner who has any kind of reliable transportation we can be off for the high mountains right pronto.

So come on, you fellows who are not scared of poison oak, rattlesnakes, sidewinders, and scorpions—let's hear from you!

OTTO OF THE GOLD COUNTRY.

Care of The Tree.

This world traveler will swap post cards and stamps with you-all.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

From personal experience I know that Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine is sold in many countries. I myself have bought the magazine in Constantine, Algeria, Oran, Fez, and Casablanca, and I have picked them up from stalls in the Arab "marche," or market place. I have even found it in Teteaun, the Spanish Revolutionists' headquarters in Spanish Morocco. I have spent ten years wandering about the globe and now that I am back in England I find myself somewhat of a stranger here. If any Pen Pals want to swap post cards and old stamps, I am the chap for them. I'll send coronation views and swap stamps from one hundred up to a thousand. I've got plenty! I especially want rodeo and wild West post cards, bronc riding, steer wrestling, roping, etc. I'll answer all letters I get. I can read and write French, German, and a little Italian.

TOM CONNOR.

18 Tracey Street, Kennington Road,
London, S. E. 11, England.

You folks who would enjoy corresponding with an hombre living in a primitive part of India will welcome this lad's correspondence.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

Folks, I am a signman in an infantry battalion of the British army, stationed in a rather primitive part of India, by the River Gogra. I am twenty-two years of age, and my home town is in London,

England. I have been in India for three years, and I have seen quite a number of interesting things. I would like to correspond with Pen Pals from any part of the world, especially from Canada and the United States, so come on, you ink slingers, get your "ammunition" out and bombard me with letters. CHARLES LUCK, 2029270.

Signal Section, H. Q. Wing, 1st Bn.,
the East Surrey Regt., Khandahar
Barracks, Fyzabad Cantonment,
Fyzabad, U. P. India.

Will the Spanish folks from South America please speak up?

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

If you "fetch up" a Pen Pal in South America for me it will be grand. I am interested in the Spanish people, and also, somewhat, in the interior of South America. I have traveled a bit and can tell the other fellow a thing or two if he cares to exchange yarns. FREDERICK PETTINGILL.

Care of Doctor Luther O. Whitman,
Cushing, Minnesota.

Here is that Pen Pal you-all have been looking for from Dunedin, folks.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

A home girl would like a genuine girl pal from some lonely place who is interested in topics near to every girl's heart. I have traveled extensively throughout New Zealand so that I can tell some tales of this land of the "White Cloud." I'm twenty-six, and wanting Pen Pals of the

same age, or older, from the West. I live in one of the main towns in this far southern land and I am interested in everything worth while.

MISS L. WILSON.

699 Castle Street,
Dunedin, New Zealand.

Here is a ranch boy, living in the foothill country of Washington.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

Although my family is not very well off I still have a good time fishing and hunting small game here in Walla Walla, Washington. I am a boy nineteen years old. I live on our own ranch in the foothills of Washington, and we own about fifty head of white-face steers, and also a few horses.

I will answer all letters, so come on, every one. Write a card or a letter.

ROY WARD.

409 Jefferson Street,
Walla Walla, Washington.

Correspondence is invited by this British Columbia farm girl.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

Here is a lonely farm girl from northern British Columbia who is living on a homestead forty miles from nowhere. I'm really lonely at times, so come on folks from all corners of the earth, and sling some ink in my direction. I promise faithfully to answer all letters. I am a collector of snaps and postmarks, and I will trade with any one who wishes. I am twenty years old.

RUBY KIMMEL.

Albreda, British Columbia, Canada.

It is a natural impulse and it is a good impulse to desire to wander and to roam. Not too much, of course. But the desire to go places and see things should be and is in all of us—in all of us who amount to anything, at least, for traveling educates us, and changing our geographic location often is of great benefit to health, mind, and economic well-being. A wise man once said, "A rolling stone gathers no moss," but a wiser man, we think, added, "but a standing pool stagnates."

If you are one who would travel, it is a mighty good thing to have man's best asset along the way, and at your destination. We mean, of course, friends.

If you would like a friend or friends in a certain section, write to Miss Rivers, and she will put you in touch with readers who want to correspond with folks in your part of the world.

It must be understood that Miss Rivers will undertake to exchange letters only between men and men, boys and boys, women and women, girls and girls. Letters will be forwarded direct when correspondents so wish; otherwise they will be answered here. Be sure to inclose forwarding postage when sending letters through The Hollow Tree.

Address: Helen Rivers, care The Hollow Tree, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.



WHERE TO GO AND HOW TO GET THERE

By JOHN NORTH

EVER so often some young chap, inspired by the seemingly romantic life of the forest ranger, writes to ask about the possibility of getting such a job. The ranger is, like the cowboy, one of the romantic figures of the West, and to the lover of life in the open, such as Bud C., of New Haven, Connecticut, his must seem the ideal job.

"Ever since I was a kid I've longed to be a forest ranger, Mr. North. I like horses, and life in the wilds, and feel sure I could make good at this work if I could only get a chance. Will you please tell me how to go about getting such a position, and give me any other information you think would be helpful?"

Well, in the first place, Bud, it takes much more than love of horses and the outdoors to hold down a forestry job. This real he-man work

in the open requires physical strength, courage, and ability to cope with various emergencies which are bound to arise from time to time in riding forest trails. You've got to be able to endure hardship, Bud, to perform severe labor under trying conditions, and to know how to take care of yourself and your horse in regions remote from civilization and supplies.

So, you see, it is a lonely life, and not an easy one. To be a ranger you must be between the ages of twenty-one and thirty-five, a citizen of the United States, have a high school education, and some knowledge of the fundamentals of forestry. You must also have at least three years of field experience in forestry work, such as lumbering, grazing, surveying, and forest-fire control, and during six months of this time must have been in a position involving direction and control of other men.

With these qualifications and this

experience you are eligible to take the Civil Service examination, which is necessary to secure an appointment. When a ranger is needed in a national forest in a certain State, an examination is held in that State, and you must be a citizen of it in order to qualify.

A ranger's chief duty is to protect his district against fire. In the dry season he usually has a number of fire guards assigned to him, and he is responsible for their work, as well as his own. Protection against fire requires good planning, efficient organization, and often long hours of hard manual labor.

In addition to this, the ranger must handle the field work in connection with the sale of timber, grazing of livestock, construction of improvements, and many other activities in the forests. And he is expected to perform such work as building telephone lines, trails, cabins, or fences when his time is not actually needed on administrative work.

Thus he must be able to plan intelligently in order to handle efficiently the many diversified activities entrusted to him. Under the direction of the forest supervisor he must carry out plans for developing the physical resources of his

district, and for growing timber. If all this practical information hasn't thrown cold water on your ambition, Bud, and you still feel this is the job for you and are willing to work hard to qualify for it, here's hoping you make it.

All set for a fishing trip to northeastern Oregon, Paul L., of Boise, Idaho, wants some more specific facts about the particular locality for which he's headed.

Yes, there are good fishing spots that can easily be reached from LaGrande, Oregon, Paul. That town is on the Oregon Trail, if you're traveling by car. At Wallowa Lake, about ninety miles from LaGrande, over a good highway, and in the midst of a fine vacation and fishing country, you can rent housekeeping cabins or pitch your own tent, and you'll be in walking or riding distance of many lakes—Ice, Ameroid, Douglas, Mirror, Glacier, Frasier, and Horseshoe.

The angling at Horseshoe Lake is said to be especially good. It is a two- or three-hour walk from Wallowa Lake, and if you don't want to hike you can rent a horse for a very moderate sum. You won't need a guide; the trails to the various lakes are well marked.

SPECIAL NOTICE

A HANDY CAMP TABLE

When you're camping, some sort of table is a necessity, and the editor of this department can tell you how to make a mighty convenient one. For directions address John North, care of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

We aim to give practical help to readers. Mr. North supplies accurate information about the West, its ranches, mines, homestead lands, mountains, and plains, as well as the facts about any features of Western life. He will tell you also how to reach the particular place in which you are interested. Don't hesitate to write to him, for he is always glad to assist you to the best of his ability.

Address all communications to John North, care of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

MISSING DEPARTMENT

ZAK, MR. and MRS. FRANK.—My parents, whom I have not seen since 1928. Last heard from in St. Mary's, Pennsylvania. Any information concerning them will be greatly appreciated by Mrs. Rose Taylor, Route 5, Brainerd, Minnesota.

NORRIS.—There isn't anything to forgive that I haven't done. Only hope that you can forgive me. I am frantic for various reasons. Not leaving here until I hear from you. Advise some other way to keep in touch with you. Not satisfied with this. Please let me hear from you at once. Goff.

PAUL.—Please get in touch with me. Tried to find you in Seattle on the 21st as everything was fixed for you to come back and go to work again. Even now there is nothing to prevent you from coming as there has been no publicity. R. G. I. and myself want you to. Mother is heartbroken. G. says please wire or write. The sooner the better. Love, M. J. C.

SCHELLENBERGER, HARRY, or CARSON (LON) H. SHANNON.—Any one knowing his correct address please communicate with his wife, Rose E. Shannon, 6521 Miramonte Boulevard, Los Angeles, California.

WILSON or SHANNON, LUCILLE ARLINE.—Any information concerning her will be appreciated by Rose E. Shannon, 6521 Miramonte Boulevard, Los Angeles, California.

KEANE, JOHN.—Believed to be of Scotch descent. Left 10 Richmond Street, Plymouth, England, in 1895. In 1926 he went to South America. He is a dyer by trade. Any information as to his whereabouts or his ancestors will be greatly appreciated by his son, William Keane, Inkster P. O., Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

HILLYGUS.—Will any relations of my father, Fred Hillygus from Pennsylvania, please communicate with Bert Hillygus, Yerington, Nevada?

LITCHFIED, WILSON RAYMOND.—Last heard from in Los Angeles, California, eight years ago. He is now twenty-three years old. He has gray eyes, dark hair and a birthmark on his left ankle. Any one knowing his whereabouts please notify his mother. Son, we want to hear from you. We all send our love. Notify Mrs. Harriet E. Richard, R. D. No. 2, New Waterford, Ohio.

SMITH, GEORGE.—Native of Milon, Aberdeenshire, Scotland. Last heard from in Portland, Oregon, in April, 1909, when he was working for a Livery and Transport Co., and boarding at the Hotel New York. He previously worked in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, and also for the Sandstone Brick Making Co., near Okotoks, Alberta, in 1908. His brothers, James and Andrew, wish to get in touch with him. Any one knowing anything of his whereabouts please communicate with Mr. J. Smith, 229 30th Avenue, North West, Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

ARNOLD, VIVIAN.—Last heard of in Russell, Kansas. Believed to have married Elmer Sample, an oil field worker. He is twenty-five years old and has brown hair and eyes, and a fair complexion. Any information concerning her will be appreciated by her brother, Jack Arnold, N. P. 2A, Grand Canyon, Arizona.

HAGELSICH, LOUIS.—My brother, who has blue eyes and sandy hair. He is forty years old, and five feet two inches tall. Last heard of in San Francisco, in 1928. Am worried about you. Please get in touch with me. Anna Cardwell, 1447 5th Street, Santa Monica, California.

CARDWELL, RUDOLPH.—My nephew. He is twenty-six years old and has hazel eyes and light-brown hair. He is five feet six inches tall. Last heard from in San Francisco in 1930. Am worried about you. Please get in touch with Anna Cardwell, 1447 5th Street, Santa Monica, California.

WILLIAMS, ELLA MAYE.—My cousin, who was last heard of seventeen years ago when she was working in an overalls factory in Warsaw, Indiana. She has dark hair and slightly crossed gray eyes, and is about five feet seven inches tall. Any information concerning her will be greatly appreciated by her cousin, Russell Vice, now Mrs. Jacob H. Gardner, P. O. Box 195, Hamilton, Missouri.

LINCK, SAMMIE L.—Last heard of in 1931, at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He was in China five years. Mother wrote to him in care of Seaman's Institute, but never received an answer. He is now thirty-three years old. Has not been seen since he was fourteen. He has gray eyes, brown hair, a pug nose and is of a heavy build. Mother is ill and wants to see him. Any information concerning him will be appreciated by his sister, Mrs. D. Fleming, 1300 N. E. 23rd Street, Substation No. 5, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

There is no charge for the insertion of requests for information concerning missing relatives or friends.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable. Because "copy" for a magazine must go to the printer long in advance of publication, don't expect to see your notice till a considerable time after you send it.

If it can be avoided, please do not send a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that those persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

Address all your communications to Missing Department, Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

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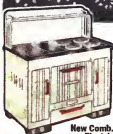
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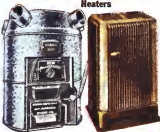
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